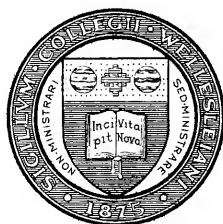




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AND

THE BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE.

THE ORIGINAL EDITION.

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VERA EFFIGIES THOMÆ DE KEMPIS AD VIVUM

Juste abbas Justorum, orator Canonorum et pastorem S. Anthonii, mortis S. Agniti, prope Zandvoort, in Dacia, tractat. In eo jugiter animo iuncto, et unum, de se coram Deo habet, et vult hanc formam in seipsum amittere. propterea, sicut et non pariter, quod et in huiusmodi, alio modo, alio modo.

THOMAS À KEMPIS

AND THE

BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE.

BY THE

REV. S. KETTLEWELL, M.A.

SECOND EDITION, ABRIDGED.



LONDON :

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PREFACE.

IT was from an earnest desire to know something more of the author of 'The Imitation of Christ' that this work was at first written, and is now published in a more concise form, that it may be brought within the reach of a large number who know and value the above most excellent publication, which has exercised so large an influence both before and since the time of the Reformation.

The life of Thomas à Kempis was peculiarly a hidden life, of which it was only possible to catch occasional glimpses from what the old biographers said of him; while there still remained much that could be learnt respecting him, though indirectly, through his own words; (1) of what he said of others in whom he was interested, and with whom he was associated; and (2) in the instructions on the spiritual life which he gave in various ways, from which we gather much information regarding his interior devotion, and his views on religion.

Another object kept in view was to bring out more prominently the nature and results of the religious movement or Society of which he was the most conspicuous ornament and chief exponent, and to give some account of the lives and characters of a few of its early members, men with whom for the most part à Kempis was acquainted, and who were largely instrumental in moulding the devout life of our author. In reproducing these memoirs which à Kempis himself has given, I have kept as much as possible to the simple and pious language which the writer employs. In the later part of this

work, sketches of the lives of many other excellent characters, with whom à Kempis came in contact, are interspersed, with the records of his monastery. The information is various, and has been chiefly drawn from some old chronicles, though mainly from two written by à Kempis; and in the substance of what has been selected I have endeavoured to avoid needless repetition, and still to preserve a continuous history of events.

The period in which à Kempis lived was that preceding the Reformation, when Europe was distracted by various dissensions and wars. In England, the frightful civil wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster were at their height. France was divided and torn in pieces by contending parties; while early in the 15th century the great schism in the Papacy was going on causing much suffering and bloodshed in Italy and Germany. In the East, succour having been refused by the Western powers, through the influence of the Pope, Constantinople fell into the hands of the Saracens, after a lengthened and noble defence. It was 'an age of the Church,' says an able writer, 'in which we seem to expect less tokens of her spiritual life than in any other, . . . and yet precisely in this century it was, that a deep and pure devotion sprang up, surpassing all that had been known before in intensity, superior to all that was to come after it in purity.' How deep, how earnest, how holy, how real this religious devotion was, the following pages will show.

In the Introductory Chapter, the chief sources from which the matter has been drawn are named: but I have endeavoured to avoid all references and notes where not necessarily called for, so as to keep the work within compass.

S. K.

KESSELVILLE, EASTBOURNE.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Information respecting Thomas à Kempis needed — His Influence on Christian Life through the *Imitation*—The earlier Biographers of à Kempis—A Kempis an early Biographer of the Brothers of Common Life—His Devotional Works, as well as the *Imitation*, a reflex of his Life.

FIVE hundred years have now passed away since Thomas à Kempis was born, and it seems only natural and becoming that some attempt should be made to give a more enlarged account of him than has hitherto appeared. His life, indeed, has been in a certain sense shrouded from the public gaze, and little direct information is to be gained of him in comparison of what might be desired respecting such an excellent character, whose name is so familiar to many Christian ears, and dear as a household word among the many numerous families and Churches of Christendom. Still, much may be learned about him, as I purpose to show, which will reflect light upon his character and manner of life, and show to us more clearly what kind of man he was. And in an age like the present, so remarkable for research and eagerness after further light and information—when no little diligence is exercised in unfolding the history of the past, and setting before the world in a more impressive and intelligent manner the many important events that have happened, and the more

celebrated characters that have exerted influence and power among their fellow men—it is much to be desired that some effort should be made to make our English-speaking race better acquainted than it is with what can be known of à Kempis; nay, it would seem a reproof to our times were we content to suffer the account of the life of such an one to lie in greater obscurity than needs be. For in the roll of God's honoured saints there are not many whose names are more universally revered and beloved than that of Thomas à Kempis, notwithstanding no place has been found for him in the Romish calendar, and but scant mention be made of him in some of the popular 'Lives of the Saints.'¹

The name of à Kempis is honoured and regarded with pious affection, not because much is known respecting the man personally by the world at large, or because they have been edified by instructive particulars of his life, but because so many in the past, as well as in the present, have felt the value of his holy counsels and have profited by them. Very many who know that excellent work of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and esteem it highly, know little or nothing of the author. A modern writer says, 'Not one reader in a thousand knows anything whatever of the history and character of Thomas à Kempis.'² Hence there appears some

¹ Butler, in his *Lives of the Saints*, only mentions à Kempis incidentally as it were, in a note, and as not worthy of a place among the pious celebrities that he enumerates. There is doubtless a reason for this. A Kempis was not in much favour among a certain class of Roman Catholics, though much beloved and honoured by others. I have searched in vain also for his name in Baring-Gould's work.

² See preface to *The Companions for the Devout Life*, St James's Lectures. Murray.

need for the present work, in which an endeavour is made to gather together all the scattered materials that can be found respecting this honoured follower of Christ, who became through his works such a blessing to his own and future generations, and to weave them as far as possible into something like a full-length portrait of him, that he may stand out to our view not in a bare name, or as a mere myth, but as one who took an active and loving part in the relative duties of life in the sphere allotted to him, and that something more definite and complete may be learnt about him.

It will be observed that I proceed on the assumption that Thomas à Kempis is the true author of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' And I came to this conclusion not lightly or after a cursory view of the subject, but only after instituting a most searching inquiry into the matter, and carefully sifting the evidence in each particular respecting the several individuals for whom the claim of authorship was made. I need not here enter further upon this matter, as the result of this investigation has been set forth in another work to which I must refer the reader;¹ but I would just add, that after finding that the title of Thomas à Kempis could be so well established and proved in so many ways, while the claims of others were found to be faulty, I felt free to take up this work, and prosecute it without any hesitation as to Thomas à Kempis being the undoubted author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' notwithstanding a few persons may still be found to favour the claims of others.

¹ See *The Authorship of the 'De Imitatione Christi.'* Rivingtons, London.

This book, which has reflected so much honour on the name of Thomas à Kempis, is in itself a wondrous production, as it has been elsewhere shown, especially considering the age in which it was written. It exercises a peculiar and powerful influence upon devout minds, which has doubtless been the cause of its marvellous and almost universal popularity ever since it appeared.¹ I do not, however, now purpose to enquire into its intrinsic merits, and what led to its singular fame and the just esteem in which it is held, further than allude to one point, to which I would in passing call attention, as it is here deserving of notice.

At the time when the *Imitation* first appeared there was a wide-spread yearning to know more of Divine truth, and how men ought to live so as to please God, which this book supplied. This arose in a great measure from the discountenance given to the reading of the Bible by the laity; a covering had, as it were, been thrown over the lamp of life and the full diffusion of its rays discouraged, for men were taught by those then in authority in the Church to regard it as a thing forbidden, or at least fraught with danger to the soul.² This, whilst it shut out the light from many souls, made others to long the more for it. And the 'Imitatio' carried conviction to numerous souls that in it the echoes of Divine truth were to be found, and men could learn therein how they might approach God and obtain His favour without the intervention of others; for it will be seen

¹ See appendix at the end of this chapter.

² Gieseler says of this period, 'The hierarchy was constantly opposed to all translation of the Holy Scriptures into the vulgar tongue' (*Eccl. Hist.* v. 74). And previous to this the reading of the Bible by laymen without permission was forbidden (*ibid.* v. 75).

that this devotional book is suffused with the spirit of the Holy Volume, though it does not generally adopt its very words. There are numberless instances where a truth or precept from God's Word is inculcated or alluded to, as can be clearly shown, where the exact Scriptural phraseology is not used,¹ and this inculcation of the Divine Will was doubtless, among other causes, the principal reason for its wide diffusion and the ready welcome it received.

This point is forcibly alluded to by De Quincey, who while speaking of 'the little book which, in past times, came next to the Bible in European publicity and currency,' makes these remarks in a note: 'The diffusion of the "*De Imitatione Christi*" over Christendom [the idea of Christendom, it must be remembered, not then including any part of America] anticipated in 1453 the diffusion of the Bible in 1853. But why? Through what causes? Elsewhere I have attempted to show that this enormous (and seemingly incredible) popularity of the "*De Imitatione Christi*" is virtually to be interpreted as a vicarious popularity of the Bible. At that time the Bible was a fountain of inspired truth everywhere sealed up, but a whisper ran through the western nations of Europe that the work of Thomas à Kempis contained some slender rivulets of truth silently stealing away into light from that interdicted fountain. . . . The book came forward as an answer to the sighing of Christian Europe for light from heaven.'²

In another place, after alluding to the fact that he

¹ See the many references pointed out by Hirsche, in his *De Imitatione Christi, Textum ex Autographo Thomæ*.

² De Quincey's *Works*, Pref. pp. v. vi.

had read this book over many times, this same writer says, 'How prodigious must have been the adaption of the book to the religious heart of the fifteenth century! Excepting the Bible, but excepting *that* only in Protestant lands, no book known to man has had the same distinction. It is the most marvellous bibliographical fact on record.'¹

In my endeavour to become better acquainted with the life of the author, I had recourse to the original accounts of him—the old biographies of Thomas à Kempis—from which the brief narratives of him that are published have been chiefly drawn. The most ancient of these biographies is by an anonymous writer, who was not only a contemporary of à Kempis, but had gathered together several things concerning him from his conversation with the Brethren at Mount St Agnes, near Zwolle, where à Kempis lived till he was very old. Moreover, the many things which he learned from the Brethren concerning the reverend Father must have been shortly after his death; for the account which he gives is to be found in one of the oldest editions of the works of Thomas à Kempis. There is a fine folio copy, in black letter, of this edition in the British Museum (1221, b. 11), which was published at Nuremberg A.D. 1494, if not printed two or three years before, since at the end of the volume it is said that it was 'finished on the vigil of St Andrew the Apostle, anno Christi 1491, Nuremberge, being accurately printed by the artificer (*opificens*) Gasper Hochfeder.' The volume is one of the rare treasures of the British Museum; for it is one of

¹ De Quincey's *Works*, iii. 23.

those existing witnesses which afford incontestable evidence to Thomas à Kempis being the true author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' which anyone can examine with his own eyes. Bearing the date 1491, it must have been printed more than a hundred and twenty years before the fierce controversy arose respecting his right to the title of authorship when other claimants were put forward to contest it; and therefore the testimony of this biographer is independent of the dispute which arose, and came from a source unaffected by it. And what he tells us is this, that Thomas à Kempis, who wrote without question the '*Soliloquy of the Soul*,' wrote also the book which is entitled '*The Interior Speaking of Christ to the Faithful Soul*,' which is the third book [Tractatus] of the '*De Imitatione Christi*;' and he quotes from this work incidentally as it were, not supposing that there was to be any question about à Kempis being the author, but to enable us to form some idea of his devout spirit and interior life.

And this testimony to à Kempis having composed the '*De Imitatione Christi*' is further confirmed by this contemporary biographer, who, at the end of his account of the reverend Canon of Mount St Agnes, speaks after this manner: 'And because he wrote and dictated many treatises in his life, and few know how they are entitled, I intend to describe them, and write out a table of his treatises and books, so that all who read and hear them may know whose they are.' This was the more necessary because à Kempis, wishing to remain unknown, had sent them out at the first mostly without attaching his own name. This table or catalogue of the works of Thomas is found in this same rare edition which we

have mentioned, and contains, distinctly described, the names of the four books of the 'Imitation.'

This important witness, then, is the earliest biographer of à Kempis, and he seems to have made himself fully acquainted with the particulars of his life whilst the recollection of them was fresh in the minds of those best able to inform him respecting the venerable saint. After mentioning certain facts and alluding to some of his pious treatises by name, the writer thus briefly sums up what he has been saying: 'There are also yet many other things concerning his life and conversation, which I have heard from the Brethren of the convent where he lived, who are yet alive, the thousandth part whereof I have scarcely declared in what I have written. But what need I say more? As he taught others, and as he instructed them both by word of mouth and by writing, even so he lived; he fulfilled in very deed, or verified in himself, what he recommended in his discourses should be done.'¹ We may indeed regret that this biographer of Thomas à Kempis did not give us more particulars, more anecdotes and incidents of his life to illustrate his character; but I may observe that he speaks of him in no uncertain language; he leaves no doubt upon our minds as to the kind of man he was; and in the words above quoted, especially when taken in connection with others to which I must allude, he gives us the key whereby to obtain more information respecting him—a key which opens to us a vast treasury, and reveals to us what passed in his inner life,—how he spent some of the most solemn and sacred

¹ *Opera Thom. a Kemp.*, Nuremb. 1494, fol. lxxxv.

moments of his existence, and what great thoughts filled, sustained, and elevated his soul.

The next of the ancient biographers of Thomas à Kempis to which I had recourse was Jodocus Badius Ascensius, another witness in support of his being the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' who wrote 'Vita Reverendi P. Thomae à Kempis,' which contains twelve chapters. This writer held an important office as librarian in Paris, and lived during the latter part of the life of à Kempis. He undertook the republication of his works, which appeared in the year 1500; and it was on this occasion that he added his Life of Thomas à Kempis, which he had drawn from trustworthy sources.

A third biographer of Thomas, who affords us some information, is Franciscus Tolensis, a Canon Regular of the same Order as that to which Thomas belonged, and who, though living later than the previous writers, was an inmate in the same monastery where à Kempis died and had spent the greater part of his life, and where he was able to gather up the traditions current respecting him, and the general impression he had left behind him. He undertook to write the life of Thomas, he says, for 'the love and reverence he had for the venerable saint, and because through him the place where he and his Brethren lived had become famous.'

Further particulars are gathered from what George Pirckamer has written 'Concerning the Life and Sanctity of Thomas à Kempis.' This writer was Prior of the Carthusian house at Nuremberg; and in encouraging the publication of the works of Thomas à Kempis he sets forth his character and speaks of him as 'that most wise, most sweet, and most religious man.' This was in the

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year 1494. Two or three anecdotes respecting our pious author are also found in a book called 'Speculum Exemplorum.' They do not stand upon so credible a foundation as the writings we have previously mentioned, but they are given for what they are worth.

Still, however valuable these ancient sources of information respecting the life of Thomas à Kempis may be, they afford us but scant help in comparison of that which we obtain from the works of Thomas à Kempis himself. He was in more ways than one the historian of the Brothers of Common Life, or of 'the New Devotion,' as the religious reformation with which he was connected was called. For we must notice first, that he has given us several short memoirs of the early Fathers and chief Brethren of the community, whom he either personally knew or respecting whom he could obtain, as he shows us, most reliable information.

Then, again, he was the Chronicler of the particular House or community where he lived many years; giving not only a history of the monastery from its foundation, and the hardships and privations the early Brethren had to endure, but keeping a continuous record of all the important, and many unimportant but otherwise interesting, events that happened, up to the very year in which he died. He had joined the Brethren in Mount St Agnes within a year after they had elected their first Prior, and was therefore well qualified as an eye-witness to speak of what took place; and in relating these matters he informs us of many things in which he must have taken part or have been deeply interested; in short, he narrates much of such events and circumstances as go far to make up the lives of most men.

Besides keeping this Chronicle of his House, he seems also to have kept a record of other events not directly connected with Mount St Agnes, but in which he and his Brethren were more or less interested, such as the formation of new branches of the Brotherhood in other parts, and such things as were worthy of remark that happened concerning them, with an occasional notice of persons held in honour among them.

Then, thirdly, his historical labours were apparent in the devout writings which he composed for the use of the younger Brethren, as also in those for the perfecting of the more advanced in the religious life. And in these he not only is an exponent of the maxims and principles which were current in the Brotherhood, but of those which he himself adopted and had made the rule and guide of his own life. He endeavoured to infuse into others that devout and holy spirit, that intense love to the Saviour, that earnest following of Him in self-denial, humility, purity, kindness, gentleness, and longsuffering towards others, that renouncing of the world and its vanities, so as not to be of it whilst living in it, that cheerful enduring of afflictions even when suffering wrongfully, that holy trust in God's providential care and goodness, and all those other godly affections and graces which so much pervaded and adorned the lives of the Brethren, and so animated and sustained himself. And in doing this—in the very earnestness of his words—he cannot help letting us see, as it were, however much he strives to keep himself out of view, or so speaks of himself as if it might be of some other person, how nearly he lived and walked with God, how much the Word of Divine Truth had been wrought in

him, what sort of spirit he was of, and what holy principles, desires, and motives governed and actuated him. His real life is in his works.

We shall therefore necessarily have frequently to make extracts from the writings of Thomas à Kempis other than those of the 'Imitatio,' and to refer our readers to what he himself says, whenever his words seem to apply to himself, or serve to throw light upon his life, or upon what was passing within or around him. It is through these means that we are able to gain a fuller knowledge of this saintly man than what is afforded us by his biographers; yet in the brief narratives which they give they indicate, as we have intimated, by what means we may know more of him when further direct information is wanting. And if at times we are tempted to lift the curtain which, as it were, screened his inner life from the public gaze, that we may behold him in his most solemn and fervid moments, and have our own hearts inflamed by the ardent devotion of his soul, let it not be thought that we are wantonly violating the sacred privacy of his lowly cell, or acting irreverently towards his memory; for we must remember that it can now in no wise affect the beautiful sanctity of his character—which might have been the case had this been done in his lifetime—but will rather bring it out into clearer light and loveliness; and, further, will carry out—though by a way which he himself might have shrunk from allowing, but which nevertheless may be rightly and reverently done by another—that which was a great desire of his heart, viz., to promote the spiritual welfare of his fellow creatures and incite them to greater love and devotion, that they, seeing the light of his holy life and conversa-

tion—his intense love for Jesus and the growing conformity to His image, might glorify our Father which is in heaven not only in praises, but by giving themselves up in like manner as he did to His service, and by walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.

In filling up the picture I have occasionally made use of the chronicles of Windesheim also, written in two volumes by a contemporary of Thomas à Kempis, called Joannes Buschius, who not unfrequently speaks about the same persons and events that à Kempis does, since he lived in the mother-house of the same Order.

While engaged in the work of constructing something like a Life of Thomas à Kempis, everything in any wise connected with him became an object of interest. Besides the points already named I was anxious to know what I could about the several places where he had lived, and with which his name was associated ; how they now appeared, and whether they had changed much since his days, and if so, what they were then like, and whether anything worth relating had occurred whilst he was there. Three places are especially named by his biographers, and are worthy of a pilgrimage for his sake, through whom they have become memorable—*Kempen*, where he was born, and where he lived till he was nearly fourteen years old ; *Deventer*, where he went to perfect his education, and became associated with ‘the Brothers of Common Life ;’ and *Mount St Agnes*, near Zwolle, where he became a Canon Regular of the Order of St Augustine and dwelt the greater part of his long life. These places were visited by me, and the result of my enquiries and observations are given.

Though I have had the opportunity of referring to other editions of the works of Thomas à Kempis, the one I have chiefly used and quoted from is that by Sommalius, 1759, in three volumes. Hirsche's edition of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' with notes, has been found serviceable. Pfarrer Mooren in his '*Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis, &c.*,' and Ullmann in his '*Reformers before the Reformation*,' have supplied me with much information in addition to what I collected during my visits to the above-named places, and what I gather from other books hereafter mentioned.

The times in which à Kempis lived were sad and often tragical. There were many dark places in the land in those days, full of cruel habitations; one power warring with another, and the petty princes making constant inroads and preying upon the people, who had to defend themselves as best they could, and often suffered great loss both of life and property. Moreover, the dissensions and disorders that prevailed in the Church herself lowered her moral standard, rent her asunder, weakened her influence for good, made her too often but an instrument of swelling the torrent of evil that swept over the nations of Christendom.

It was, however, an age when the revival of learning took place, when men began to think and act more for themselves in religion, trying to find their way out of the darkness that encompassed them. It was marked by the invention of printing, by an intellectual development not altogether confined to the Church, and by an earnest desire for more personal religion, not always dependent upon the clergy. There was a more conscious realisation of Christian faith—not of that unreasoning sort which

takes all that is said for granted, but that which displayed itself in seeking to know amid many difficulties, what was revealed of Divine Truth in the Word of God, and both to rest and act upon it more. The supremacy of the Church was still acknowledged, but many were beginning to feel that it was needful for the State to have an independent authority in temporal matters ; and the question was most warmly debated how far spiritual authority resided in the Pope, and how much in the bishops and doctors of the Church assembled in Council. Though some of the religious bodies that arose set themselves in opposition to the clergy, and afterwards fell into vices and grievous errors, yet in the awakening of that period there was in some places a large manifestation of real piety displayed and pursued in all godly quietness, and people in large numbers were brought back from a hollow profession, dull despair, and gross superstition to realise the blessings of Christianity, whilst to the earnest student a new career of enlarged thought and action was opened out.

Such was the state of affairs in Europe during the time that à Kempis lived, and what can be said of him and his Brethren of the Common Life forms a bright and hallowed spot on the dark background of the picture that is drawn of those unsettled and turbulent days. Once only did the storm of persecution reach them, and drove them away from their moorings ; but for the remainder of his life he and they were allowed to dwell in peace, though the noise of tumult and bitter strife in the distance was heard and more than once threatened to come down upon them again and disturb their calm and hallowed life. No wonder that à Kempis

should speak in enthusiastic terms of the quiet shelter and sacred privileges to be enjoyed in a religious House, and express deep thankfulness to God that he could in such a place give himself more entirely to the cultivation of the interior life and devote himself in no small degree to the furtherance of true religion. Though he shrunk from entering into public life as some ecclesiastics did, and would take no part in the religious controversies which prevailed and distracted the minds of many from a holy life, yet he took no mean part, however quietly he laboured in company with others, to effect a thorough restoration of vital godliness. For this inward reformation in the hearts of men they wisely carried on so as not unnecessarily to come into open conflict with the rulers of the Church. They sought to overcome the evil that existed in the Church and in society not by directly attacking the evil so much, as other reformers did, but by overcoming the evil with good, manifesting to others a better life, and persuading men to learn and embrace Christianity with a fervency whereby wickedness and corruption would not be able to stand or find a foothold among them.

In person Thomas à Kempis was somewhat under the middle height, with a fine broad forehead and thoughtful massive countenance of the Flemish cast. The colour of his face was fresh, with a slight tinge of brown. His eyes, when in repose, were large, grave, and bespoke a mind engaged in contemplation, as if he were absorbed in looking at what was beyond the present; but in ordinary conversation they lighted up with loving interest and had withal an animated and penetrating gaze; and when speaking upon Divine

things his features would beam with intelligence, and both his look and voice would have an attractive effect upon those who listened to him.

As regards his personal conduct and religious views, the admirers of the '*De Imitatione Christi*' and those who desire to know something more of its author will be glad to learn further that he was indeed the pure, loving, self-denying, devout man which so many have lovingly imagined him to be. There may be a few points on which we may not agree with him. The ideal of the Christian life may seem to some pitched too high, and the religion presented to our view too severe. There often appears a suppression of the natural affections in the endeavour to subjugate self—a separation of the religious from the secular life which seems carried too far—and there is a clinging to a few doctrinal errors and superstitious customs which all cannot hold with. Those of us who have been brought up within the bosom of the English Church have happily a form of doctrine resting on the firm basis that nothing is to be required as necessary to salvation but what can be proved by Holy Scripture; and we are naturally jealous of anything that has not this warrant, and are firmly opposed to whatever is repugnant to it. And it may be we are so satisfied with the fruit as to think little of the tree that bore it, and how those aforetime had to grope their way in darkness and to struggle with a terrible thralldom. Making allowance, however, for the times in which these men lived, and the social conditions of their outward life, differing from our own, we may often behold in their lives and teaching a closer conformity to the example of Christ, and a more literal

interpretation and attention to His precepts, than is presented to our view in this too sceptical and self-indulgent age. But as regards à Kempis those points on which we differ from him may easily be eliminated amid so much that is good and profitable for our spiritual advancement and worthy of our attention; for though living in a dark and superstitious age, he became an ardent student of Holy Scripture when it was much neglected, and sought not only to be enlightened by it, and to shed its bright rays on all around him, but strictly endeavoured to make it the rule and guide of his life, and not less the foundation of his teaching.

Of his wonderful love for the Saviour it is difficult to speak; but it was so intense, and cast forth such a lustre, that a few, ignorant of his real character, have imagined that it made him oblivious and negligent of the love and regard due to his fellow men. But this was not so. Though he loved God his Saviour above all else, so that he was jealous lest anything, or any person, should intercept or lessen this affection for his Lord in any degree, yet had he been well taught, and had well learnt to follow the example of Christ, and the precept of His apostle, that 'he who loveth God should love his brother also,' since from love to Christ he willingly spent his whole life in promoting the spiritual interests of those around him. There was, indeed, no loud display or marked singularity in what he did, for he was of a gentle and unobtrusive disposition, shrinking rather from notice and from putting himself forward, but he was none the less active and earnest in supporting every good work.

There is sufficient evidence to show that he had a

warm and affectionate heart, full of sympathy and tenderness of soul towards others. In early years his spiritual superiors were drawn towards him by his peculiarly sweet and unworldly disposition; he made some close and dear friendships with two or three of those living in the same house, whom he loved as his own soul, and with whom his mind was in sweet accord, so that their hearts burned within them as they talked together of Divine things. And in after years men's hearts were singularly turned towards him for counsel and direction; they loved to hear him talk, to be strengthened and encouraged by him to persevere in the narrow way; and so meek, courteous, and condescending was he that the humblest might approach him without timidity. This is amply corroborated, but it may here suffice to give the words of one well able to speak on the matter as an authority. For 'this good and devout Father,' says his contemporary biographer, 'was very affable and consolatory to those who were weak and tempted, and exceedingly zealous for the salvation of souls, and desired that all might be saved, even as he himself; so that it was his main endeavour to draw others also into the Kingdom of Heaven with himself, by his writings and admonitions, by public instructions, and by all other means and ways in his power, as St Gregory exhorts in a certain homily should be done.'

It is a great fallacy for writers to think and argue that because a man exhibits a great personal love for the Saviour he must therefore have the less love for his fellow kind, and that because he is very zealous for the salvation of his own soul he is the more uncon-

cerned about the souls of others, for this is contrary to truth and general experience; for who are those most concerned for the salvation of others? Not those who are indifferent about their own salvation, and think lightly of it, but those who have themselves felt the need of a Saviour, have earnestly sought for mercy at God's hand and enjoy a sense of His pardoning love. And thus it was with Thomas à Kempis. He is another witness to the truth that those who are the instruments of quickening others must first be quickened themselves, and that before they can communicate light to their fellow men they must have it beforehand in themselves.

So zealous was Thomas à Kempis for his own salvation that he was in truth an ascetic, and, like St Paul, who said, 'I keep my body under and bring it into subjection,' he kept up through life a rigorous self-discipline. He felt in himself, as others who are quickened do, that the infection of sin was present with him, and that it was necessary to use severe measures to restrain the corruption that stirred within him. At one time of his life he was in the habit of chastising himself every seventh day with the scourge, whilst he sung aloud the hymn commencing, *Stetit Jesus*.¹ He felt that the flesh was ready to lure him to sin, to indolence and forgetfulness of God, and therefore it must be kept in subjection to the spirit; that the world would seduce him by its vanities and estrange him from his Saviour, and therefore he must renounce it in a more complete manner than is usually done; and that covetousness, and a desire to possess things for himself, were apt to

¹ Franc. Tolensis, *Vita Thom. a Kemp.* sec. 12.

blind and obstruct the soul's progress, and therefore he embraced a life of holy poverty.

Thomas à Kempis greatly cultivated and commended what is termed the interior life—the living a life hidden with Christ in God. He is consequently frequently spoken of by historians as one of the Mystics of that period. Not meaning thereby a dreamy visionary, as the term now too often conveys, but one who recognised a supernatural power in true religion, and fully embraced a spiritual life;—one who walked not after the flesh, but after the spirit, and felt that forms and ceremonies were of little value unless the heart were engaged in them. He loved in a special manner to hold sacred communion with Christ his Saviour, and to meditate upon Divine Truth. This intercourse with his Saviour was most precious to him; and a pleasing anecdote is recorded of him, by the same contemporary biographer from whose narrative we have before quoted, which shows what a very sensitive apprehension he had of his Lord's presence, how jealous he was of any interference with it, and, however otherwise occupied, how ready he was to yield a preference to it. 'This good Father,' says the writer, 'when he was walking abroad with some of the brotherhood, or with some of his other friends, and suddenly felt an inspiration come upon him—namely, when the Bridegroom was willing to communicate with the bride, that is, when Jesus Christ his Beloved did call to his soul as His elect and beloved spouse—was wont to say, "My beloved brethren, I must now needs leave you;" and so meekly begging to be excused, he would leave them, saying, "Indeed it behoves me to go; there is One expecting me in my cell." And so they accord-

ingly granted his request, took well his excuse and were much edified thereby. And thus was there fulfilled in him that which is written, "I will lead him into solitude and there will I speak unto him." And Thomas himself said unto the Lord, as it is written, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Now, what he then spake unto the Lord, and what the Lord spake unto him in return, we have in that treatise entitled "Concerning the Voice of Christ Speaking inwardly to the Faithful Soul," which treatise has this very saying for its text in the second chapter, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," the which Samuel the prophet spake unto the Lord when the Lord had called him.'

I would observe that in the above quotation we are pointed to what is now the third book of the '*De Imitatione Christi*' for illustrations of the holy converse he held with Christ our Lord, and how he spent some of the most supreme moments of his inner life. And without at present entering into further particulars in this general survey of the life of Thomas à Kempis, I would briefly sum up what I have said by observing that this volume of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' which has been so long prized among us and is so well known, is but a reflex of his life, and that the one is in a remarkable degree the complement of the other. For these memorials of à Kempis and the Brethren will serve to illustrate and give a kind of living reality to the words of the IMITATIO, and the IMITATIO will help us to understand and realise more fully what the life of Thomas à Kempis must have been. All that is written in this precious book was well considered and digested by him, and passed through the crucible of his own

experience, and nothing was recommended by him to be done but what, as we have been informed, he himself did. I cannot do more, however, as I proceed, than occasionally give a few instances of this accordance.

APPENDIX (see p. 4).

WE cannot forbear giving one illustration of touching beauty, by a late gifted writer, to the value and peculiar influence of this excellent book. The career of a bright and affectionate nature is depicted, and a season comes when, checked by some temporary disappointments, a sense of loneliness and utter privation of joy steals upon the heart. No smile can be gathered from the sunshine. The shadow has indeed come over this young life, for every affection she has, every delight, was like an aching nerve. There was no music for her any more. She longed for books that had more in them than what she had yet read. "Télémaque" was mere bran; Scott's novels and all Byron's poems were hardly what she wanted. 'She wanted some key that would enable her to understand, and in understanding endure the heavy weight that had fallen upon her young heart. If she had been taught "real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew," she thought she should have held the secrets of life.' And so she applies herself to hard study for a time, and 'a certain mirage would now and then rise on the desert of the future, in which she seemed to see herself honoured for her surprising attainments.' For awhile she went on with resolution enough, though with an occasional sinking of heart, as if she had set out to the Promised Land alone, and found it a thirsty, trackless, uncertain journey. But, alas! as days went on discouragement deepened, and tears filled her eyes, while she had to endure a 'wide hopeless yearning for that something, whatever it was, that was greatest and best on this earth.'

One day in her lonely trouble she listlessly examines the books on a window shelf, but one after another is laid down, till at last she takes up one with the title of 'Thomas à Kempis.' 'The

name had come across her in her reading, and she felt the satisfaction which everyone knows of getting some ideas to attach to a name that strays solitary in the memory. She took up the little old clumsy book with some curiosity; it had the corners turned down in many places, and some hand, now for ever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen and ink marks, long since browned by time. Maggie turned from leaf to leaf, and read where the quiet hand pointed. . . . "Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world. . . . If thou seekest this or that, and wouldst be here and there to enjoy thy own will and pleasure, thou shalt never be quiet nor free from care, for in everything somewhat will be wanting and in every place there will be some that will cross thee. . . ." Lib. iii. cap. 27.

Many other passages are here given from the 'Imitatio,' and then the writer continues, 'A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been awakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor. She went on from one brown mark to another, where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading, seeming rather to listen while a low voice said, "Why dost thou here gaze about, since this is not the place of thy rest? . . ."'

Several more selected passages follow, and then again the writer proceeds, 'Maggie drew a long breath and pushed her heavy hair back, as if to see a sudden vision more clearly. Here, then, was a secret of life that would enable her to renounce all other secrets; here was a sublime height to be reached without the help of outward things; here was insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme Teacher was waiting to be heard. It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasures, as if that were the central necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires, of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an

insignificant part of a Divinely guided whole. She read on and on in the old book, devouring eagerly the dialogues with the invisible Teacher, the pattern of sorrow, the source of all strength; returning to it after she had been called away, and reading till the sun went down behind the willows. . . . Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. She knew nothing of doctrines and systems—of Mysticism and Quietism—but this voice out of the far-off Middle Ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message.

‘I suppose that this is the reason why the small old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay sixpence at a book stall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness; while expensive sermons and treatises, newly issued, leave all things as they were before. It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's prompting; it is the chronicle of a solitary, hidden anguish, struggle, trust, and triumph—not written on velvet cushions to teach endurance to those who are treading with bleeding feet on the stones. And so it remains to all time a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours, but under the same silent, far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness.’—*The Mill on the Floss*, book iv. chap. iii.

I would here also append some words of M. E. Caro from a preface he wrote to a new translation of the ‘Imitatio’ into French lately published, as he takes up a point which it is desirable to keep in view in such a sceptical age as this, as a reply to those who think that such a high state of spirituality as set forth in this work is likely to be injurious. For speaking of the exalted tone of its Christian teaching he says:—‘An ideal, raised to such an elevation, cannot be dangerous. For, is it apprehended, we may well ask, that the study of the “Imitation” may spread through a whole nation the contagion of asceticism? Or do we really fear that it may dispossess each of us individually of his natural taste

for this world's possessions or for himself, and transform us into a nation of saints and mopers? Assuredly not. But if this ideal, placed thus before our eyes, makes us attach a somewhat less value to riches, honours, vain laudations; if it help us to put off, though ever so little, an immoderate love of what is only brilliant and evanescent, to worship ourselves a little less—what is there to complain of? Do we fancy that there will ever be found among us too many men of a pacific, humble, disinterested character, knowing when and where obedience is due? Seriously, is any one to be found, in an age so positive as ours, ready to cry out against the inconveniences of too much spirituality, or the peril of renunciation and self-denial? For my part, I would augur well, on the contrary, of a state of society wherein the taste for such meditations prevailed; where I saw spring up anew, with the idea of self-sacrifice, a sense of what is divine, a manly and voluntary obedience to that rule which, in civil life, is called law; of attachment to that enlarged cell which is called the domestic hearth;—to those solid virtues, in fact, engendered by discipline, which render a nation invincible; and to that general accumulation of religious belief which is capable of re-creating a conscience amidst the moral anarchy in which the world is tossed and lost.'

CHAPTER II.

The Parents, and early training of Thomas à Kempis—Tauler's Mission—
History of Kempen—Events during the home-life of à Kempis.

THOMAS A KEMPIS was born in the year 1379 or 1380,¹ at Kempen, a small but pleasant town in the diocese of Cologne, and situated about forty miles northward of this city, in the flat and fertile country bordering the Rhine.

Another town, it should here be observed, has been named as the place of his birth, very similar to it in sound; for one of à Kempis's early biographers, Badius Ascensius, asserts that he was a native of Campis or Kampen, in the diocese of Utrecht. But in this he is evidently mistaken, for à Kempis himself says, in his 'Chronicles of Mount St Agnes,' that he was a native of Kempen, in the diocese of Cologne. Another writer also, continuing the chronicles of the house after his decease, states the same fact respecting him when recording the death of this reverend father. Moreover the inhabitants of Kempen claim the honour of his being a native of their town, and have done several things to commemorate his memory, while those living in the other town lay no such claim. The error has probably

¹ Both Eusebius Amort and Mgr. Malou give the year 1379, other writers 1380. The record of his death in the *Chronicles of St Agnes* is in 1471, and it is there stated that he died in the 92nd year of his age.

arisen in the mind of Badius Ascensius from imagining that as Kampen, in the diocese of Utrecht, was not far distant from Mount St Agnes, where à Kempis lived the greater part of his life, and contained two houses of the Brothers of Common Life, it was in all likelihood the place where he was born. And this error of Badius Ascensius leads other writers astray, for the author of the 'Life of John Kettlewell, the Nonjuror Divine,' speaks of Thomas à Kempis as 'that holy man Thomas a Campis,'¹ so that many readers are scarcely able to recognise under this name the same individual as our author, and it is only by the connection of another name mentioned with his that we are assured who is here meant.

According to the custom of the times, à Kempis afterwards took his name from the little town where he was born. His surname, however, was Haemmerlein or Hemerken. The former of these is the one adopted by the authorities of the British Museum, and under which name the several works of Thomas à Kempis, in various editions and translations, are found. It is the name used also by his oldest biographer, and was that by which he was probably best known in Holland. The other is the one more usually adopted by other early writers when they speak of his patronymic, and notably by the individual who records the death of à Kempis when continuing the 'Chronicles of Mount St Agnes.'

The interpretation of the name signifies 'hammer' in English, 'maillet' in French, and 'malleus' or 'mal-leolus' in Latin. And the anonymous contemporary biographer of à Kempis takes occasion from this to

¹ Vol. i. p. 2, folio edit. 1719.

show how expressive of his character is the name which he bore from his parents ; for, says he, ‘according to his name so was he both in words and works, “like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.” And this,’ he continues, ‘he was both to the devout and the indevout. To the *devout* he was so by striking their hearts with the Word of God, and exciting them by his writings to greater ardour in devotion, to higher advancement in holiness, and to livelier acts of love and praise ; and he was so to the *indevout* by pricking them to the quick, by stirring their hearts to compunction, by bringing them to the acknowledgment of their own imperfections and infirmities, and by calling them to true amendment of life, as with repeated knocks and calls ; also by comforting the tempted and the afflicted, by strengthening the weak and faint-hearted ; and, lastly, by showing unto all—namely, to beginners, to proficients, and to the more perfected, according to the difference of their several states—the way of life. So that this saying might rightly be applied to him, “They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.”’

The parents of à Kempis, called John and Gertrude Haemmerlein, were held in good repute by their fellow citizens, but were only in moderate circumstances. His father was of the artisan class, and while he had to labour diligently for the support of himself and his family he set his son an example of honest industry, patience, and simplicity in living. His mother is represented as being sedulous in the education of her children, attentive to the concerns of her household, active in her habits, very abstemious, not given to much talk, and

extremely modest in her behaviour. And what was more, they were both truly religious, for of them it might well be said, as it was of Zacharias and Elizabeth, 'they were both righteous before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' His mother is especially mentioned for her distinguished piety and for the influence she exercised over her son Thomas in early implanting in his mind the love of holy things.

There was in à Kempis from early childhood a natural disposition for a quiet and holy life; he seemed sanctified from his mother's womb, and was one of those few who appear to have preserved from their baptism the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. The seeds of piety began to show themselves in à Kempis very early, and were noticed by his parents and relations with no little interest. We are told that his mother was 'greatly affected with it, and made it her whole endeavour to encourage in him betimes a contempt of the pomps and vanities of the world, and to inspire him at the same time, day by day, with affections for heaven; and in pursuit thereof, for the humble and holy life of our blessed Lord, till the little sparks in his tender soul were by this means blown into a flame which failed not afterwards to manifest itself as he grew up in various ways, to the edifying of all such as conversed with him.'

Her teaching, though of the simplest and most practical kind, and such as a child could understand, was earnest and such as left its impression. It was not the mere knowing of truths and things that she taught him, as the doing of them—the living in accordance with

what he learnt. Practice went hand in hand with precept. It has been thought that some traces of her religious instructions may be found in à Kempis's 'Manual for Children,' which contains short addresses for 'little ones.' As à Kempis advanced to man's estate he appears to have had a special love and regard for children, and to have had much faith in the value of training them early in the knowledge of God and of His ways. The remembrance of the holy lessons learnt in tender years at his mother's knees had silently sunk into his heart and had not been altogether forgotten; plain as they were, they were evidently sweetly brought back to his memory when he had to teach and guide others; and in the simple admonitions which he gives, in the manual alluded to, we doubtless have portions, or at least the character, of those sacred instructions which had left some blessed impression upon his own mind. They are very short, and each has a text of Scripture.

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that the home culture of a holy life was fostered in the breast of à Kempis by his mother alone. She was eminently worthy of notice for this, and probably the earlier years of his childhood were moulded by her; but the father took no mean part in forming the mind of his son for the future service of God. Especial mention is made of this by one of the earlier historians of à Kempis, who devotes nearly three chapters in setting forth the habits of life which the youth embraced and to which he became inured through his father's counsel and example. John Haemmerlein's life was one of toil and hardship, yet was it adorned by the love and practice of holy poverty, humility, and patience. For it is remarked, that as children are more observant

of the habits and principles of their parents than most people give them credit for, and frequently adopt them, so Thomas was much indebted to his father for his having been early accustomed to these godly virtues which were taught him. In two places this writer intimates that à Kempis has recorded the impressions thus received in his book 'On the Three Tabernacles,' from which it may be inferred that the counsels and sentiments contained in this work are, to some extent, drawn from the example and admonitions of his father.

The three Tabernacles are Holy Poverty, Humility, and Patience, and a few passages are here given as worthy of notice :—

Christ. When I was rich and wanted nothing I was not ashamed to become poor and indigent for thy sake. And oughtest not thou, who art poor and naked, and who broughtest nothing into this world, attentively to consider this ?

Cease, then, thy complaints. I esteem it to be sufficient for thy consolation that thou intently regard the magnitude of My poverty.

It is not for the servants of God to rejoice chiefly in the good things of this world and to conform to its pomps, but to despise its delicacies and fly to the sweetness of My poverty.

Truly My poverty and humility are delicious to those hearts who regard the riches of the world but as dross.

Poverty in pious minds is wont to be the guardian of Humility. Behold, O Poverty, behold her concerning whom I have spoken to thee. I have loved her from the beginning. Defend this Humility, for she is a special delight to Me in My saints.

That poverty is not blessed which knows not humility ; neither is humility pleasing to God which despises poverty.

'Many come to Me,' saith Christ, 'elated in heart, and I hear them not ; they ask not that they may be freed from sinning, but that they may appear just before men.

'They desire devotion, but they are unwilling to suffer shame with Me ; they covet humility, but they dread to be despised by men, as the humble are.

‘They seek to love virtue without the hatred of vice, and are deceived in their desires, because he who would taste the sweetness of virtue ought to extirpate from his heart every vice and every evil passion.’

It is often a consolation to the miserable to reveal his misery to a friend. And the angry wound, when it is opened, is less painful and more easily cured. To thee, therefore, O Father of mercies, have I made known my cause.

Christ. Do not be cast down in tribulation, because tribulation is a consuming fire. It purgeth away sin, however; extinguisheth presumption, driveth away dissoluteness, bringeth in a salutary sorrow, gives a distaste of worldly things, and leads a man to become an imitator of Christ.

Wouldst thou relinquish these advantages, since true patience worketh these things in thee, through tribulation? Do not seek for peace except in God, but strive after peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which the world cannot give.

When compassed about on every side with tribulations, remember that it is the way of the saints, through which they passed to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Learn to comfort thyself also, because that in this thou art made like unto Christ Jesus, thy Lord; and return thanks, if thou art in any small degree able to repay this to Him. For I say unto thee that it is a greater merit in thee to suffer affliction patiently than to perform good works.

Thomas saw his father cheerfully and contentedly accepting the humble lot of life in which the providence of God had placed him, unambitious of attaining to a higher station or being brought into notice, but quietly and gladly enduring toil, hardships, and many inconveniences without murmuring. He noticed, or at least remembered afterwards, how he avoided contentions and disputes, how he yielded subjection to those in authority, and showed respect unto all men; how sparing and frugal in his habits, not wasting or abusing God’s blessing by

any extravagance or indulgence as others, yet not selfishly hoarding up his little store, but imparting of what he had to others who had need, being very helpful and considerate of the necessities of those about him. And these things—though they seemed to come naturally, and might not be so much thought of by Thomas in his younger days—left their impress upon him, and led him afterwards to know the worth of that virtuous life which he daily witnessed in his early years.

And though John Haemmerlein was one of the common artisans of Kempen, he had along with his wife imbibed the principles of vital Christianity, and together they endeavoured to mould their lives and that of their children by them. Christianity was no mere name or profession with them, but a new and living reality. There is little doubt but that they regularly attended the ordinances of Divine worship in the church at Kempen, and sincerely endeavoured to pay that homage which was due to the Almighty from all His creatures. But in addition to this it is evident that they kept up a fellowship with a few other devout and humble souls, who encouraged and strengthened one another in a godly and upright life. It is probable enough that Thomas often heard and listened to the pious intercourse and friendly counsels that passed between them. It is true they had no printed Bible in those days, and only portions of it written with the hand were to be obtained. These and other fragments of pious writings were precious and much coveted by them. They would lend them to one another, and read them over when they met together; and when they

talked with one another their hearts seemed to warm with the love of God their Saviour and the bright hopes of heaven. And in the latter years of his stay under the parental roof young Thomas's heart was in no little degree sweetly drawn and early inflamed to the love of Divine things and the desire of a religious life, by what he heard.

Thus the home training of à Kempis was in many ways favourable to the formation of a saintly character, and well fitted to incline him to embrace a religious life. As the picture of that pious home at Kempen is brought before us, in considering his boyhood, it seems to remind us much of that other lowly but blessed home at Nazareth where the Saviour of the world was brought up, for in many respects the home of à Kempis was like to the earthly home where Christ lived in His youth; and it is pleasing to know that from his very childhood he was taught to love and follow his blessed Lord.

And here we stay to enquire how it came to pass that during this period, which is regarded as part of the dark ages, when there was such a decay of vital godliness in the land, and such a dearth of the Word of God, we find such an instance of sterling piety as was evidently exhibited in the humble cottage at Kempen. The fact comes upon us as a surprise, and it will be interesting to some to ascertain by what probable means this pious couple were brought into the way of righteousness. Now, it is well known to the student of history that about the middle of the fourteenth century there was an earnest and godly man named Dr John Tauler, 'highly esteemed by the early reformers,' who by his

powerful preaching 'had begun and promoted a very considerable reformation in these parts,' whereby the lives and habits of the people were greatly affected, and numbers were drawn from slavish superstition and gross ignorance to follow him in the cultivation of the inward and spiritual life of Christianity. Besides this there had been an endeavour to gather together into small religious societies all those who were awakened to a knowledge of Divine Truth and were wishful to live a new life in Christ. In various villages and parishes a few of the more godly thus banded together in holy fellowship, to promote among themselves true practical piety, and to encourage and stimulate each other to continue devoted followers of the Lord. There was no attempt to separate them from the Church, but the design was to raise up in her members a newness of life, a vital godliness, and Christian fellowship which had been sorely wanting. There seems little doubt, then, but that the father and mother of Thomas were brought under the influence of Tauler or of some of the missionaries associated with him, and were probably joined to one or other of these little companies of godly people; for, from some allusions to them by an anonymous author, there is reason to believe that they were more or less associated with those religious congregations or assemblies.

There is much that is interesting in the career of Tauler, to whom the parents of Thomas and the country were indebted for this awakening of religious life. He was providentially raised up to do the work of an Evangelist in a benighted age. Like an apostolic missionary, he went from place to place calling upon

the people to repent and amend their lives. To them he preached the Gospel, making Christ and His salvation known, and leading them to embrace a new and earnest Christian life. His labours were extended throughout the whole of the Rhine country, but more especially did he take the large centres of population at Cologne, Strasbourg, and Basle. A few years after this, a similar work of evangelisation was carried on northward — that is, in Holland and Gelderland — by another man of great devotion, Gerard Groote, or Gerard the Great, as he was called, of whom we shall shortly have to speak more at length, and to whose institutions Thomas à Kempis joined himself and was greatly indebted.

But now let me tell you something about Kempen, and what happened there while Thomas was a boy. There is often a peculiar interest in the birth-places of great and famous men quite independent of external surroundings. Be they on the bleak side of a barren moor away from the busy haunts of men, or in a back street of some country town, within the reach of many passers-by; or be they otherwise devoid of anything to make them remarkable or attractive, there is nevertheless in some breasts a feeling of singular regard to the spots where men of note were cradled and brought up. Some such feeling stirred within me and made me anxious to view the locality where the pious author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*' had first seen the light, and where his childhood had been spent under the watchful guardianship of his pious parents. I wanted to see what the place and neighbourhood were like, and I wished also to ascertain whether any memorials or traditionary reminiscences of his early days were to be met with;

whether there were any interesting annals belonging to the town worth recording; and especially whether I could learn anything of moment that transpired there during the time à Kempis was under his father's roof.

way
personal
scene
the hand
to Kempis
Ta K!

Accordingly, in the autumn of 1875 I went in company with a friend to visit the place. The town of Kempen is not difficult of access to the English traveller; for as he goes on his journey to the Continent by the new route *via* Queensborough and Flushing, and on through Holland and Germany, he will pass it on his way. We had been staying a few days on our homeward journey at Cologne, and took it on our return. After travelling about forty miles from the city of the Three Kings, the train drew up at a small but neat railway station. There is nothing very attractive or striking in the appearance of Kempen or the neighbourhood—no picturesque beauty in its position or surroundings, or anything worthy of much attention. It presents indeed a comfortable, home-like, cleanly aspect, similar to many other country German towns. For some distance before reaching Kempen the country is flat and monotonous. The eye has no distant hills to rest upon; there is no varied landscape of wood and water to admire and gaze upon. The fields lie open to the road; there is hardly a stone wall to be seen, and only a hedge or two near the town. Here and there a row of trees may be noticed lining and pointing out the direction of the roads. Short posts or ditches are mostly used to mark the boundaries and divisions of property. The land is extensively divided into small patches, or more frequently strips, producing a variety of crops, which make the country, and especially as you near the

town, more like a series of allotment gardens. Small farm-houses with their outbuildings, surrounded with their stacks of corn and hay, are dotted up and down, and in some cases sheltered by clumps of trees. The ground seems thoroughly well cultivated, and though the look-out is somewhat tame there is a sense of quiet repose, content, and prosperity about the neighbourhood which has a soothing effect. It was a beautiful autumnal afternoon; the remaining crops of the harvest had just been gathered in, the shadows were beginning to lengthen out, and a soft fragrant breeze was stirring; so it was not to be wondered at that the travellers should feel a pleasing and tranquillising influence steal over them as they drew near to their destination.

When we alighted at the station, the first thing that took our attention was the sweetness and purity of the atmosphere. Perhaps it was the striking contrast we felt between the close, stuffy atmosphere and noxious vapours of the city we had left behind, to the light, invigorating air we breathed that made us exclaim, while our minds were full of à Kempis, 'What a healthy and bracing spot this is in which to rear a child!' Besides, at first sight there was a brightness and cheerfulness about the place that was refreshing. A few plain but neat residences lined the road as we passed on to the town, and numerous little well-kept gardens with fruits, flowers, and vegetables were to be seen, which gave a comfortable appearance. When we had proceeded half-way we perceived on the left hand, opposite to an angle of the road leading directly into the town, a large well-built structure, which was the gymnasium or public school. Here, as we afterwards learned, formerly stood the old

castle of Kempen. Further on we saw a fine church; then as we came more into the centre of the town the houses looked older, and were somewhat irregularly built, many of them being turned into shops, though the greater part still remain as private residences. Proceeding a little further, we came upon another church, which proved to be the site of the old parish church of Kempen. Our interest in it, however, was somewhat diminished when we found that there was little of the old structure left that had existed in à Kempis's day. It had been almost entirely rebuilt in a plain, substantial way, without much regard to architectural beauty. A part of the ancient building had, however, been left, and was pointed out to us, and to this we turned with some interest, for on the wall there appeared rather a good fresco, though somewhat faded, of a group of saints, and on this à Kempis must have gazed in his youthful days. Great care is taken of this spot, for a curtain is drawn across it to preserve the figures.

From this church it is but a little distance to the 'Stadhuis,' or small town-hall, where all the public affairs of the town are transacted and justice administered. It is a very plain building and stands out a little on one side of an irregular square, which is the market-place. We entered the building, however, to look at a large portrait of Thomas à Kempis which we heard was to be seen. It is hung up in the principal room. The venerable Canon of Mt. St Agnes appears seated in his ecclesiastical vestments, and is looking down, so that we do not get a sight of his eyes.

Few vestiges of the old town as it was in à Kempis's time now remain, and it was in vain to search for the

house where he had lived in his youth. Old and dilapidated as some few of the buildings appear to be, they have nearly all been built since that period ; and yet, as may be gathered from old records, the direction of the streets in the centre of the place is much as it was, since the old lines have been kept throughout many changes. But still the town in other ways is greatly altered. It is now open to the country on every side, but when à Kempis was a boy there it was surrounded by strong walls and protected by a moat. It had also four gates, each having two towers, leading to the four quarters of the town, which formed an irregular polygon ; and between the gates several watch-towers were placed for protection. For safety the city wind-mill was also placed within the walls.

But, to go back a little further still in the history of Kempen, anterior to the time of à Kempis, it is recorded that in the place where the town now stands was formerly a wood, stretching further to the north, over light dry ground ; and to the south of it there were boggy morasses, formed by the retreating bed of the Rhine. The wood formed a boundary line to mark the division of territory. It afterwards fell into the hands of the Church of Cologne. Being an outlying district of that Church, a mission station was planted here when an advance was made upon heathenism. A place of worship was erected for the scattered inhabitants of the country, which eventually became the site for the ancient Church of St Peter, near to which other houses were built, which formed the nucleus of the future town. Eventually walls were built around it, with gates and towers, and two if not three fosses dug, for its fortification ; and a town council formed.

In the year Thomas was born, *i.e.* in May 1380, the foundations of the citadel were laid and completed in four years under the direction of John Hundt, one of the burghers. This was deemed necessary both to restrain the burghers from following the example of other towns in rebelling against their lords, and further also to protect the town, as well as the tithe lands, from the hostile inroads of depredatory bands. Immediately after the citadel was finished, and during the first half of the fifteenth century, this fortified place was used as a prison for the knights and their retainers that were taken captive in the constantly recurring petty feuds of those times. The plundering expeditions of Count Engelbert IV. of Mark, a sort of freebooter, proved the great necessity there was of such a well fortified stronghold. To avenge the disgrace of the imprisonment of his brother Adolphus of Cleves, he came into the neighbourhood with his band of followers and committed serious devastations. This was in the year 1392, when Thomas was about twelve years old. It was in the month of August, when the barns were full and the grapes were ripe for the vintage. He stopped about nine days, attacked various places in the surrounding country, and did much mischief. It was a regular plundering expedition; for he squeezed out of the people 10,000 goldens and 200 cartloads of wine, besides carrying other things away with him. His appearance caused great consternation in Kempen, and every available citizen capable of bearing arms, among whom doubtless was the father of Thomas, stood prepared to make a good defence. Putting on, however, a bold front, and the place being well fortified, Engelbert hesitated to attack it, and finally

drew off from the neighbourhood without making any assault upon the town; so that the people of Kempen got off with a fright, without being pillaged.

The house where Thomas lived with his parents was near the old cemetery in the neighbourhood or precincts of the ancient Church of St Peter. Though they were poor and had to labour diligently, as well as to use great economy, for their daily sustenance, there is every probability that the house they lived in was their own. In the register or archives of the town there is a record that in the year 1402 John, the elder son of John Hemerken, sold, on behalf of himself and his brother Thomas, their house at Kempen adjoining the cemetery. A certified copy of this record of the sale of the house is given by Pastor Mooren as attested by two witnesses or actuaries of Kempen. We hear little or nothing of the father or mother of Thomas after he leaves Kempen, but we infer from the record alluded to above that at the time of its date they were both dead; and as the brothers were living together in the new, but small and very poor Monastery of Mount St Agnes, near Zwolle, neither of them had need of the house; and as, moreover, by the vow of poverty neither of them could retain possession of it, however small the value, they had evidently determined to sell it, and give away the proceeds to some charitable object—most likely to supply the necessities of their own monastery, which was very much in want of support.

We are told that the father of Thomas à Kempis cultivated a small farm, and at the same time followed the trade of an artisan. Whether he cultivated the farm on his own account or as a labourer is somewhat un-

certain. It was formerly the custom for the more wealthy owners to hire labourers to till small portions of their land, and to take the produce; and it is probable that the father of Thomas was one of those thus employed; most likely he took this work to fill up his time and eke out a livelihood, for which his craft did not suffice. Old Hemerken's trade is thought to have been that of a worker in gold and silver, or a maker of belts. Either of these trades would require the use of a hammer; and some suggest that from the use of this, either by himself or his forefathers, he obtained the surname that he bore.

The appearance of the church at Kempen, which then existed, and to which Thomas was wont to go with his parents—as represented on an old civic seal—was somewhat heavy, and of Romanesque architecture. The clergy-house, with all its buildings, was close to the church, and had been erected in A.D. 1337 by means of the liberal bequests of Gotfried Kessel, or Kettel—a rich childless old knight. The clergy that served the several altars had to assist their superior, the rector, not only in the services of the church, but also in the cure of souls. And when they wished to take the Holy Sacrament to the sick and dying in the country they were provided with a horse.

Like other towns of smaller or greater importance, Kempen then possessed its public school. At the synodical judicature for 1392, just before Thomas left Kempen, the name of Henricus appears as *Rector Scholiarum*, and he was doubtless for a time the preceptor of Thomas; and it is probable that one Jacob Welinch might have also, in some degree, had this honour.

It comes within the compass of the time when Thomas was still at Kempen to note, in passing, a significant fact, which shows that it was not without its learned men. Among the thirteen doctors of the Sorbonne who opened the newly established University of Cologne on the fête day of the Three Kings, A.D. 1389, and delivered lectures, one of them came from Kempen. His name was Alexander de Kempena; but little is said about him further than that he belonged to a preaching order. Another notable circumstance worthy of being recorded is, that the plague which caused such fearful devastation in the surrounding country in the fourteenth century entirely spared Kempen. Notwithstanding their escape, however, from the pestilence, which should have caused them to be the more merciful towards others, the citizens rose up against the Jews. From the records it is evident that there was a Jewish community in the town of Kempen, as appears also from one of the streets being called after them. In various parts of the country the Jews had dreaded the coming of a storm which was gathering against them. From a chronicle dated as far back as September 1347 we learn that many of them had taken flight. But years afterwards some of those who remained in Kempen were accused of having forged the sheriff's seal, in order to spread false reports, so as to make gain out of the citizens; and for this—whether true or not—two of their number were seized and burned to death in the meadows outside the town. And from other old chronicles it would appear that the Jews were eventually altogether expelled from Kempen.

During the childhood of à Kempis one of the most

important and useful institutions of his native town was founded. A rich burgher named John von Bruchhusen gave up his own house in the market-place, together with other adjacent buildings belonging to him, for the erection of a hospital, which he richly endowed. There was a poor-house also, where the indigent and infirm were received and cared for; while from another institution other poor people were supported by alms, given to them in the church every Monday. Some years afterwards alms were given on Fridays also.¹

The subsequent history of Kempen shews that it was subject to many sad changes, chiefly those of war. It shared in the troubles of the Thirty Years' War, and sustained at various times several severe sieges. Other changes followed, and eventually its walls were demolished, and the town sunk to a very low ebb. It has, however, gradually revived of late years, and is now a thriving place.

Such are some of the particulars of interest regarding the town which was the birth-place of the celebrated author of the 'De Imitatione Christi' and from which he took his name; and it is through him, and the veneration and esteem in which his memory is held throughout the whole of Christendom, that the town of Kempen has been rendered famous.

When à Kempis was about thirteen years old he had to leave Kempen to pursue his studies elsewhere. In another chapter we shall follow him to his future destination.

¹ Many of these particulars are drawn from Mooren's *Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis*.

CHAPTER III.

Thomas à Kempis received by the Brothers of Common Life at Deventer—
An Account of the Place—Thomas enters the Public School—The
Devout Lives of the Brothers—The Life of Gerard Groote, the Founder.

JOHN HAEMMERLEIN the elder, and his wife, having carefully and affectionately trained and brought up their son Thomas to walk in the ways of holy obedience, now determined to send him to Deventer, that he might be further perfected in his education, and probably with the hope that he might eventually be enabled to enter the ministry of the Church and serve God in such a holy calling. At that time there was a celebrated Public School in this place, and students came thither from all parts of Holland and from other distant countries. There was also in the same town the newly constituted Society of the Brothers of Common Life, to which allusion has been already made, and was then in great repute, which fostered the religious life, and gladly held out a helping hand to earnest-minded young men who were needy and unable wholly to support themselves, but who showed some ability for learning. Besides providing them with the shelter of a pious home where they would be faithfully and lovingly tended, and incited to a life of holiness and virtue, they afforded them some means of subsistence, and to some extent provided payment for their instruction whilst studying at

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Deventer

the Public School; holding out to them, at the same time, the prospect of finding them some suitable employment, whereby they might permanently support themselves. The Public School at Deventer, and the Community of the Brothers, though separate institutions and wholly independent of each other, were brought into close contact, and rendered the one to the other most essential service in carrying out the designs each had in hand. Some of the Brothers especially qualified for the work, would assist in teaching the youths of the school, and encourage them in good ways; and while some of the scholars who showed signs of piety and ability were to a certain extent assisted by them, the school in turn furnished the Brotherhood with new and youthful members to be instructed in their own zealous ways of religion and to be taken into their fellowship; many of whom afterwards wrought much good and became ornaments of the Society.

Thomas's elder brother John had been sent to Deventer some years before to receive instruction at the school, and had met with much help and encouragement from the Brothers. The good reports that his parents had received of him from time to time were very satisfactory, and showed that he not only had made great advance in learning, but that he was in great favour with the Superior and the other Brothers. He had already been admitted as a member of the Society, and was now in a position not only to support himself, but to instruct others—if he did not even in some degree contribute to the support of the poorer scholars in the school. What better course, then, or one more likely to conduce to the advancement of Thomas, their other son, in

every way that they might desire, could his parents take, than to send him to the same school at Deventer, since there was a prospect that he might receive some support or encouragement from his brother, if not directly at first from the 'Brothers of Common Life'? It is probable that John à Kempis, as he was called, had urged his parents to send his younger brother to this place, or that there was some understanding that he should come when old enough.

It is evident, however, from what afterwards transpired, that there had been no recent communication between them about this matter. The means for corresponding between distant towns were difficult and uncertain in those days, and his parents were ignorant of the change John had been induced to make when they sent their younger son away. But another reason is given why they were further encouraged to send their son to this place, viz., the excellent accounts they had heard of the kindness, learning, and piety of Florentius, who was at the head of the 'Brothers of Common Life.'

Deventer, to which Thomas bent his steps, is the chief city of Overijssel, in the lower Netherlands, in the Diocese of Utrecht, and is about twenty-six miles from Arnheim and sixty from Amsterdam. As Deventer is the place where a few of the most important years of Thomas à Kempis were spent, as well as the centre from whence sprang a great religious movement, about a hundred and fifty years before the Reformation, I shall give some further account of it here.

The whole of the district which is now called the kingdom of Holland belonged at that time, and for

many years afterwards, to the German Empire. The most powerful prince of the country was the Bishop of Utrecht, and among his vassals he numbered the Counts of Holland, Gelder, and Cleves.

The country round Deventer is like that of Kempen, flat and uninteresting: you can see but a small portion even of the town as you approach it by the train. It is a much finer place, however, and of more importance at the present than Kempen, since it has several good streets, having capital shops in them, and other well-built streets with private houses. There are moreover four squares or open places; and in the centre of one of them is the great Cathedral Church called St Lebuin, with its large massive tower. It is a fine edifice, in the Gothic style, and was built A.D. 1040, and consequently was in existence when Thomas went to Deventer. The tall pillars in the interior of the church ascend to a finely vaulted roof, and give the whole building a most spacious appearance.

When I visited Deventer in 1875 I should have found some difficulty in prosecuting my inquiries had it not been for the kind help, and directions to sources of information, which I received from Dr L. A. Burgersdyke, the head-master of the Public School there; the Rev. Dr Junius, one of the preachers at the Collegiate Church; and Dr von Eyk, the librarian of the 'Bibliotheke.' The memorials of Thomas à Kempis, or of 'the Brothers of Common Life,' are, however, necessarily few. The site of the old school was pointed out to me,¹ and part of the old wall which still remains; the rest of it is

¹ Here Erasmus was also taught, many years after Thomas left the place.

entirely new, and the building wholly different in its arrangements. It is satisfactory to find, however, notwithstanding the changes time has wrought—and they have been many in that country—that on the very site of the schools where Thomas perfected his education there is still an excellent public school. The Brother-house, which was built after Thomas left Deventer, chiefly by money one of his friends bequeathed, has entirely disappeared. The house in which Father Florentius lived was near this, for the garden where he used to walk with Thomas and the other members of the Brotherhood must have been at the back, looking towards the spot where the railway station now stands, but bounded by the stream which runs between. In the 'Bibliotheke,' which is on the upper floor of the Hôtel de Ville, we found a fine old MS. psalter, with several other manuscript books which had formerly belonged to 'the Brothers of Common Life.' But, singularly enough, the library did not contain a single manuscript copy of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' or any other manuscript written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis.

A thriving trade is here carried on; several manufactories of various articles exist, some of which are aided by the steam engine. The place is noted also for a kind of spice bread, which is made in large quantities. Upwards of 400,000 loaves of the ordinary quality are annually turned out, in addition to the large number of a finer sort, which are exported to the East and West Indies. There are several pleasant walks along the banks of the river Yssel and in the neighbour-

hood, the principal one being the Worp, where in fine weather the band of the National Guard plays many lively airs.

When Thomas entered the city it presented a somewhat different appearance to what it does now, being then also a fortified place. From an old plan of the city wherein you obtain a bird's-eye view of it, as it then was, it is seen, that in addition to the walls of the city, with its five large gateways, it had an outer wall for defence, with watch towers at regular distances. The river Yssel flowed close by on one side, and a deep moat or fosse went nearly all round the remainder of the walls. On the north-west side the outer wall and the fosse took an extra circuit and enclosed ten wind-mills for the use of the citizens. The very year that Thomas went to take his place in the Public School the country was in a state of great excitement. The Prince-Bishop of Utrecht had died, Florentius van Wevelinghoven, a man who had been much connected with the beginnings of the new religious movement that had taken place, and was very anxious for the welfare of souls, but not distinguished for his learning. It is recorded of him that such was his ardour in prayer, that it at times exposed him to the ridicule of his clergy; but upon being made acquainted with this his only reply was, 'What wonder is it that, seeing I have many sheep, I should make many prayers?'¹ But scarcely had he passed away from his earthly career than the Count of Holland and Zeeland—Albert von Bayern—and William, Duke of Gelder and Jülich, marched against Utrecht with considerable forces, both

¹ Neale's *Jansenist Church*, p. 76.

of them desiring to fill the vacant see with a nominee of their own.

The candidate supported by Albert was Roger von Bronkhorst, a cathedral dignitary of Cologne. Duke William, however, wished to appoint Frederick von Blankenheim, Bishop of Strasbourg. Upon this a keen strife ensued between the electing clergy as to which of the candidates should be chosen to be the Bishop. Each of them had a party that warmly supported their claims. At length Frederick von Blankenheim received his authority from Pope Boniface IX. to fill the vacant see. After he had entered upon his episcopal duties, he is reported to have exercised a firm, but still a beneficial rule for thirty years. Clothed with temporal power as well as spiritual authority, he conquered the Frieslanders, subdued the province of Drenthe, and crushed a revolt in his own capital which threatened to become dangerous. The Chroniclers of the Monasteries of Windesheim and of Mount St Agnes—that of the latter being Thomas himself—speak most highly in praise of Bishop Frederick von Blankenheim. They call him ‘the father of the Land,’ ‘a pillar of the Church,’ ‘a protector of all good men,’ and ‘his reign as the golden age.’ Beneath his fostering care his subjects enjoyed peace and quietness; many monasteries were founded, and the schools of Deventer and Zwolle, meeting with his support and approval, flourished greatly. His last words on his death-bed, that he would be sorely missed, were indeed verified. He died on the 9th October 1423, at his castle of Horst.¹

Having arrived in the city, the first thing Thomas

¹ Mooren's *Nachrichten über T. à K.*, p. 36.

had to do was to enquire for his brother John: great however must have been his disappointment to find that he had left the place, and was not likely to return. Here was a difficulty which Thomas had not counted upon, and he was in some perplexity what to do. A new institution, according to the express wish of their patron, Gerard Groote, had been lately founded, of Canons Regular, of the Order of St Augustine, by the Brothers of Common Life, at Windesheim, an account of which will be given later on; and Thomas's brother had been chosen to be one of the six first Canons, and had consequently gone to live there. So after a little rest and refreshment he again started off to seek his brother.

John à Kempis, as he was called, was at this time about twenty-eight, and consequently about fifteen years older than his brother, whom he had probably never seen. When Thomas, then, had found him out, and made himself known, the new and youthful canon of Windesheim was agreeably surprised, and gazed upon his brother with no small delight and interest; and there is every reason, from what is said, to believe that he gave him a warm and affectionate greeting.

Loving enquiries had to be made first about the old people at home, their beloved parents; then Thomas acquainted his brother with the object of his visit, and that it was by his father's advice and direction he had come to him. John, wishful to know more of his brother's mind and disposition, entered into loving and fraternal intercourse with him, and soon found that the earnest desire of his heart was to devote himself to God's service. John himself was deeply imbued with

the love of God and the desire to spend his life in the service of Christ, and it much rejoiced his heart to see his younger, and probably only brother, coming forward and presenting himself as a young recruit in the noble army of Christ's soldiers. With deep interest he listened to all the pious youth had to say; he entered keenly into the project for furthering his education at the public school at Deventer; he greatly encouraged him to persevere in the course of life that he had in view, and which had been marked out for him; and promised to render him what assistance he could.

Such a meeting of such brothers must have been touchingly sweet and sacred; much had they to say to each other; the elder one telling the younger how he might hope to succeed, and what kind of a life he would have to live, as well as assuring him of the blessedness of pursuing and embracing a life given to God with his whole heart: it may be that he held out to him the hope that they might one day live and labour together in the same monastery—which indeed afterwards came to pass—and be able to strengthen each other by devout intercourse and loving fellowship. Be this as it may, when Thomas took leave of his brother to return to Deventer, the latter gave him a letter of introduction to Florentius, the Rector or Superior of 'the Brothers of Common Life,' warmly commending his brother to his care and regard.

Arriving again at Deventer, with a heart the more inflamed with devout affections through the loving intercourse he had held with his brother, Thomas went and knocked at the door of the house where Florentius

lived, and upon being ushered into his presence presented his letter of introduction.

Florentius was still in the prime of life, but pale and of a thoughtful countenance, enfeebled through ill health, and of a delicate frame. He was clothed in a long garment of ordinary coarse grey cloth, which reached down to his ankles, with a belt round his waist. Florentius seems to have received Thomas very kindly and compassionately; and being possessed of a keen insight into character, took a particular liking to the youth from the first. It may be that he was partly prepossessed in his favour through the recommendation of his brother, who was held in high esteem among them, and with the hope that another youth from the same pious home at Kempen might eventually prove a valuable accession to their community; but there was a peculiarly modest, devout, and quiet demeanour about the lad which especially seized the fancy of Florentius; and without any hesitation he took Thomas into his care, and provided a temporary accommodation for him in his own house; he had him to his table with the rest of the Brothers living with him, got him placed in the school, and supplied him with necessary books. This enabled Florentius also to gain a greater insight into the opening character of Thomas, to personally direct his studies at the beginning, and to give him some useful and earnest counsel in pursuing his academical course.

Here he came at once, just for awhile at the first, into the very bosom of the religious Society of what was termed 'the Modern Devotion.' Here he saw reverend and pious men, some older than their Superior, but all

paying due deference to him, some younger of saintly appearance, but all clothed alike; some few, however, wore their garments down only to the middle of the leg; these were the lay members of the little community; the others were ordinarily called Clerks (clerics) or Fathers. From most of them he received a kind word, and one or two took special notice of him. This doubtless was to some extent for his brother's sake, who had lived in close communion with them; so it made Thomas feel at home as it were, and truly thankful. Being brought into daily contact with the Superior, and with these other men, eminent for their piety and learning, he had frequent opportunities of listening to their discourse, and observing their habits and ways of life, which failed not greatly to impress him, and made him ambitious to become like them. It made him eager to begin his studies in earnest, and filled him with the pious resolution to seize every opportunity he should have of fitting himself right well for future usefulness in the service of God.

His stay in the house of Florentius, however, was necessarily not of long continuance. After awhile the Superior obtained a lodging for him in the house of a pious and benevolent lady, where he was sheltered and maintained with several other students; Florentius still watching over him with fatherly interest. This is one of the few portions of his life about which Thomas himself speaks; it is briefly given, and we shall let him tell his own story. He is led to do this incidentally, in a sort of introduction to some short sketches which he gives of several of the first members of the Congregation of the Brothers at Deventer.

‘When I came to Deventer,’ he says, ‘for the sake of prosecuting my studies in the years of my youth, I enquired the way I should take to the Canons Regular at Windesheim. And having there found my brother, living with the said Canons, I was induced by his counsel and encouragement to apply to that most reverend of men, Master Florentius, a vicar of the church of Deventer and a devout priest, the sweet fragrance of whose fame had already reached the upper provinces (that is, of Germany at that time) and already had inspired me with a reverential love of him; since I frequently heard a great number of students speak well of him, and of the excellency of his instructions in divine things. Everyone who saw him or heard him acknowledged him to be a truly religious man; for in the eyes of all men he was full of grace, being a true worshipper of God, and a most devout reverencer of our holy mother, the Church. When I came, therefore, into the presence of this reverend Father, he, being at once moved with pity towards me, kept me for some little time with him in his own house, and there he prepared and instructed me for the schools, giving me, moreover, such books as he thought I might stand in need of. Afterwards he obtained a hospitable reception for me into the house of a certain honourable and devout matron, who showed much kindness both to me and to several other clerks.’

During the first years when he attended the school for instruction at Deventer, John Boheme was the rector, and by Thomas’s account of him he was a rigid disciplinarian, and exercised a strict government over the youths under his charge. He was an intimate friend of Florentius, and greatly admired him; he frequently heard him preach, and showed much kindness to those in whom Florentius took an interest. Thomas relates an instance of this as regards himself. At the end of the course Thomas appeared before the master, and offered to pay the school fees, as the rest of the students did — Florentius having provided him with money for this purpose, that he might not be burdensome or be-

holden to anyone. But here it is better that Thomas should continue the tale in his own way, for it is one of lovely simplicity and generous sympathy.

‘I, among the rest,’ he says, ‘gave him what was owing, and asked for the book which I had left with him as a pledge. As he knew me, and was aware that I was under the care of Master Florentius, he said to me, “Who gave thee the money?” I replied, “My Father Florentius.” Then saith he, “Go, carry back to him his money, for out of love to him I will receive nothing from thee.” I therefore returned the money to Father Florentius, and said to him, “Out of love to thee, my master has given me back the school money.” “Thank him,” he answered; and said, “For the future I shall endeavour to reward him with more precious gifts.”’

The money was doubtless not very great, but, partly to express his gratitude to them both, Thomas thus relates the incident very circumstantially.

The manner in which these two pious and learned men, Father Florentius and Boheme, the rector of the school, mutually aided each other in their works and labour of love comes out incidentally in another touching reminiscence which Thomas gives respecting himself at this time. The rector of the school was also one of the vicars of the principal church at Deventer, as well as a Master of Arts; and he required several of the youths under his instruction who had the necessary qualifications to attend and sing in the choir. Father Florentius would often attend, to show his interest also in the work and to encourage those who took part in it, as well as for the sacred delight he himself seems to have had in the psalmody of God’s House. The tale also shows the very sensitive influence which Florentius, from the very beginning of Thomas’s career at Deventer, exercised over him.

‘It was my custom,’ says Thomas, ‘to attend the choir singing in the church with my schoolfellows, according to the desire of my master, Boheme, who had the management of the choir as well as of the school. As often then as I saw my superior, Florentius, standing in the choir, the mere presence of so holy a man inspired me with such awe that I dared not speak when he looked up from his book. On one occasion it happened that I was standing near him in the choir, and he turned to the book we had and sang with us. And standing close behind me, he supported himself by placing both his hands upon my shoulders; and I stood quite still, scarcely daring to move, so astonished was I at the honour he had done me.’

Whilst in the house of that pious and benevolent lady, he continued to attend the Public School regularly, and was very modest, yet earnest and devout in his behaviour. He was diligent and persevering in learning and made great progress. Florentius was not only satisfied with him, but highly pleased, and after living with his benefactress for some time he was received into one of the Brother-houses. Thomas shall now again speak for himself as to what he thought of the Society he had entered, and as to how he spent the time with his Superior and with these godly men when out of school.

‘Now having joined such a saintly man and his brethren, I had the opportunity of daily watching and attending to their devout ways and conversation, and was greatly rejoiced in beholding their good lives and listening to the gracious words that proceeded from the mouths of these humble men of God. Because I never remember to have seen before such godly men so inflamed with the love of God and of their neighbours; who while living in the world had not a spark of worldliness about them, and seemed to care nothing for temporal gain or business. For abiding quietly at home, they busied themselves in copying books, especially the sacred Scriptures; and, frequently engaging in devout meditations, they obtained comfort and refreshment in the midst of their labours, by having

recourse to ejaculatory prayer, or short aspirations of the soul. Early in the morning, they went to church and said the office of Matins, and during the celebration of Mass, they offered up to God the first fruits of their lips and the outpourings of their hearts, and prostrating themselves on the floor they lifted up pure hands and the eyes of their souls to heaven, beseeching God with prayers and tears to be reconciled to them through the all-atoning Sacrifice.'

Thomas then informs us how he was ravished with constantly beholding the spiritual conversation of the rector of this religious society, a man filled with wisdom and understanding in the knowledge of Christ, and adorned with all the Christian graces, living humbly with his presbyters and clerks, and imitating the form of the Apostolic life, when the Church was first founded at Jerusalem. Therefore, he continues, having one heart and one soul in God, everyone brought of the things that he possessed or had earned by his labours into the common fund, and received out from thence again what was simply necessary for food and raiment, taking no thought for the morrow, but enjoying all things in common, and calling nothing his own.

'Having therefore,' he says, 'voluntarily dedicated themselves to God, they all studied to pay a willing obedience to the Rector or his Vicar in every particular. Holding holy obedience to be the highest rule of life, they endeavoured with all their might to conquer self, to subdue their evil passions, and to break the motions of their own natural will ; each fervently beseeching the others to seriously reprove him for his faults and negligences. Hence great grace and true devotion were among them, and they edified many both by their word and example. And, by patiently bearing the derisions of those who were in bondage to the world, they won many over to a contempt of worldly things. So that those who before time had despised them, now counting their past lives to be without honour and as foolishness, afterwards turned to God, and ex-

perienched in themselves the grace of devotion ; and having first purged their consciences, they openly confessed themselves to be true servants of God, and their real friends. Therefore many men and women, happily despising the vanities of the world, were turned to the Lord ; and endeavouring to follow the counsels of our beloved Father Florentius, diligently studied to observe the precepts of the Lord, and to engage in works of compassion, out of Christian devotion to the poor. For all his Brethren assisted him in holding forth the Word of Life, which as the light of heaven shone upon a troubled world, fast waning away.'

The number of Clerks or Clerics living with Thomas in the same Brother-house, which was one of the first of this confraternity, and served as a pattern for many others which were afterwards established, were, as our author tells us, generally twenty ; but in addition to these there were three laymen, who were charged with the temporal affairs of the house, viz., the Procurator, who made all the purchases, and transacted whatever business had to be discharged out of doors ; the Cook, who prepared the meals in the kitchen, and assisted in distributing them at the table ; and the Tailor, who mended and looked after their clothes. Three or four of the clerks were ordained clergymen, and the head of the House was called the Rector, or Prior. As the Brothers were so much occupied in transcription, they appear to have had also among the other functionaries of their establishment the Rubricator, the Ligator, and the Scripturarius.

But the employment of writing did not exempt Thomas, any more than the others, from taking a share in the necessary household work. It was the custom of the Brothers to take their turn to assist the cook for instance in the kitchen, so that they all might be servants

in turn to their Brethren, not declining to discharge the very meanest offices, so that hereby they might be well exercised in the grace of humility. Thomas especially makes mention of his having often to go and draw water out of the well—lying at some distance in the garden—for the use of the household: and in telling this he takes occasion to relate what might have been a sad accident, but which providentially was not attended by any serious injury. The story was this: One day whilst Florentius, their beloved Rector, was holding a collation, as it was called—i.e. giving them friendly instructions on sacred things—round the well, several of the Brothers sat upon the brim while listening to his earnest exhortations, when through heaviness one of them fell asleep, and forthwith presently fell head foremost into the well; prompt measures were taken for his deliverance, and wonderful to relate, by God's goodness he was rescued without much hurt. The well was narrow, but to the great astonishment of them all, the man that had fallen in was found upon his feet, and was drawn up alive and sound. Thomas indeed was not present when this happened, but his having frequently to draw water from the well reminded him of it, and as it is suggested, the consideration of it was a good memento to him to be vigilant and attentive to the exhortations of his reverend preceptor.

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In doing the servile offices of the House, there was also this further advantage which he mentions, that whilst the one whose turn it was to assist was labouring thus for the rest, all the others were obliged to offer up prayers for him. And for this reason, even Florentius, their pious Rector, would by no means be excused

from taking his week in turn, however much he was importuned not to do it. For he taught his disciples this lesson by his own example—that works of piety ought sometimes to give way to works of charity; and, that an humble soul is capable of benefiting more by rightly doing the work of a family, out of love to Christ's members, whensoever called thereto, than either by being at church, or by prayers and meditations in the closet; yea, that the humblest offices of charity were to be preferred in such cases before what seemed more sacred.

There are several other particulars of interest relative to his sojourn at Deventer, that appear in the slight sketches which Thomas à Kempis gives of the first members of this Brotherhood, which I purpose to bring before the reader, but before I proceed with them it is necessary that I should give some more explicit account of the origin and history of 'the Brothers of Common Life' and of its founder, Gerard Groote, or Gerard the Great, as he was afterwards called by the members of the confraternity; since he is ever regarded as the prime mover of this fervid manifestation of real Christian life.

Posterity is chiefly indebted to the pen of Thomas à Kempis for what can be learnt concerning this high-minded and most enthusiastic servant of God, Gerard Groote, the originator of the religious movement in Holland called the *Modern Devotion*, and the founder of the Communities of *the Brothers of Common Life*. Another source of original information respecting this excellent man is to be found in the *Chronicles of Windesheim* by John Buschius, a contemporary of Thomas. A few particulars are gathered from other authors and

given to us in the 'Biographie Nouvelle' and by Delprat, Ullmann, Mooren, Neale, and others.

Thomas à Kempis in his preface to the Life of Gerard acknowledges that he had not seen him in the flesh—for he died four years after à Kempis was born. But he adds, 'Yet I have personally known many of his most intimate disciples, from whom I have frequently heard many things concerning his blessed actions, so that you must not think that these things which I have described arise from my own imagination, but that I have received them as thoroughly verified from really trustworthy persons of both sexes.'

Gerard Groote was born upon the Brink at Deventer in the year 1340 of distinguished and wealthy parents. His father, Werner Groote, held the office of burgo-master and sheriff in the town; and his mother is said to have united to a deep piety a most generous charity. Gerard received the rudiments of education in the school of his native place. And showing great powers of mind and an ardent thirst for knowledge, he was sent by his parents at the age of fifteen to the then famous University of Paris; and in about three years received the degree of Master of Arts; having devoted himself especially to the study of theology and the Canon law, not only from a desire to be a teacher of men, but because, from family interests, the clerical profession offered brilliant prospects of promotion. He was also ambitious of distinction, for says Thomas, 'As yet he did not in studying seek the glory of Christ, but following the shadow of a great name, he cared most intensely for human fame.'

He afterwards repaired to Cologne, and lived in

great style as a nobleman; he here held conferences with the learned, and obtained a professorship in the university, and grew daily into greater repute. He obtained several prebends, and was made Canon of Utrecht and Aix-la-Chapelle. But as his affectionate biographer states, 'being not yet inspired by the Spirit of God, he walked along the broad way of the world, until through God's loving-kindness he became changed into another man.'

Having an affluent fortune, it appears that he trod the usual path of a worldly-minded clergyman. He took part in public amusements, treated himself to the richest food and most costly wines, dressed his hair, wore gay clothes, a girdle with silver ornaments, and a cloak of the finest fur. Gifted with a fine intellect, and having gained a large acquisition in knowledge, he was a man of mark, according to the prevailing spirit of the times. But soon deeper and more serious thoughts were awakened within him.

It came to pass that one day, whilst at Cologne, when diverting himself as a spectator at some public game, being very intent upon it, there came up to him a stranger of a goodly and reverend aspect, wearing the habit of a hermit, and whose attention had for some time been drawn to the unusual powers of mind that Gerard possessed, and said to him, 'Why standest thou here intent upon vain things? Another man thou oughtest to become.' This indeed seemed strange to him, yet it did not make much impression on him at the time.

Another warning, however, came to him after this, for when he returned again to Deventer he was seized

with a grievous malady and lay at the point of death; and when he came to make his confession in order to receive extreme unction, the priest required that he should destroy all his manuscripts relative to magic and astrology. Gerard, after some resistance, made the sacrifice, and sent them to the Brink, where they were solemnly burnt. But there was still another voice before he openly broke with the world. This came through his former friend and confessor at Paris, Henry de Kalkar, who effected at his house an inward and definite conversion. Kalkar had been made Prior of the Carthusian monastery of Monichuysen, near Arnheim, and hearing that Gerard was again at Utrecht, which was only a dozen leagues from Arnheim, he went there without delay to see him. Gerard expressed great joy at seeing him who had been his Mentor and acquaintance at Paris; and after the first expressions of friendship had been made, Henry revealed to him the true object of his visit.

He conversed with him many days together regarding the Sovereign good, the Life Eternal, and the Judgment which follows death. 'Death is suspended over our heads,' said he to his friend; 'we know not either the day or the hour of its approach: suddenly we have to render an account of the actions of our life, and there will be much demanded of those who have received much. If, on the other hand, you would consecrate your faculties to the cause of truth and virtue, you would profit by the excellent graces of those who follow Christ.' These conversations brought back to the conscience of Gerard the warning of the good hermit, the holy ecstasies that at times had pervaded him in the cathedral at

Cologne, and the warning of the priest at Deventer when he appeared to be near death, but especially the remorse for the sins of his youth, and his frivolous life as a canon. The words of his friend, by grace from on high, softened his heart. He became ashamed of the vanity of his conduct, and at last declared himself convinced, and determined to change his life. He was yet only at the age of thirty-four.

‘At that time,’ says Thomas à Kempis, ‘the state of the world appeared most lamentable; there were few that preached the Word of Life, either by their lips or their lives; fewer who preserved continency; and, grievous to say, the name of holy religion, and the state of devotion, for lack of the Holy Ghost, exceedingly fell away from the footsteps of the Fathers.’

Not long after this, Gerard began of his own free choice to live altogether a different life. For after due deliberation, and trusting in Christ, he renounced the whole of his benefices, threw aside his costly garments, and clothed himself in a simpler habit, such as was worn by an humble clerk, preferring the contempt of the world to his delight in riches. At the sight of this change, they who had so much admired him before, now concluded that he was beside himself, and that too much learning had made him mad. ‘Behold,’ they said, ‘he who before this wore ornamental robes, now covers himself with a garment of grey undressed wool: and he who delighted in convivial banquets and dainty food, rejects these delights, and seeks what is common and of little worth; he flies from honours, he loves poverty.’ Nevertheless the hand of the Lord was with him; and from being proud he became humble, from loving

delicacies he became abstemious, from being worldly-minded he became spiritual, from searching after curious matters he held to what were simple and devout.

In order that the Divine seed planted in his heart might take root and have time to spring up, so that it might not be a mere transient feeling, which like the morning cloud passeth away, he withdrew himself from his native city and from his father's house, and retired to the Carthusian Monastery at Monichuysen, over which his friend presided, and there spent three years in serious self-reflection, prayer, and the study of the Holy Scriptures, reading the Fathers, especially the works of St Augustine, and submitting himself to the most rigorous penitential discipline.

At length by God's good pleasure the time arrived for bearing good fruit; and by the counsel of wise men and the religious Brethren, he was called forth to preach the Word of Life openly, that by his voice, and through the example of a holy conversation, he might inflame the hearts of sinners and profit many souls. From his former learning, his great abilities, his late retirement for prayer, and the study of the Scriptures, and from the examination and discipline of his own soul, and now from his burning zeal to win souls for Christ, which was ever present to him, he was eminently qualified to undertake the work of an Evangelist, and consequently to speak with great power and efficacy. Having first obtained a license from Florentius von Wevelinchoven, the Bishop of Utrecht, to preach the Gospel over the whole of his diocese, we find him travelling in a coarse woven garment through towns and villages, everywhere exhorting the people to repentance and amendment of

life with overpowering eloquence. He entirely abandoned scholastic subtilties, and the vulgar arguments drawn from the fears of hell and the joys of a material paradise, which formed the current coin of the preaching of the mendicant monks; and on the contrary he dwelt on the love of God, His regard for man, the necessity of an interior life, and that the kingdom of Heaven consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for the possession of which they must aspire with all their strength, that they may become participators in the reign of God.

And multitudes of those that heard his sermons were pricked to the heart; and coming to him, submitted themselves to his direction, and cast away from them all the vanity of the world.

But this faithful preaching of the Gospel, whilst attended with such singular success, that many of the clergy and rich people, as well as many artisans and labourers, were led to embrace a new life, nevertheless, stirred up in many minds much ill feeling and opposition. And many of the common clergy and monks dogged his steps, and viewed all that he said and did with suspicion. At last they so far prevailed as to get the Bishop to withdraw his license for preaching. And though this was a sore trial—to be stayed in the full tide of doing such a wonderful work—he at once submitted to the decision of the Bishop. But he did not therefore remain idle. As one door was shut, another seemed open to him; God had another grand work for him to do and bring about: and this was the establishment, in conjunction with others, of the Society of ‘the Brothers of Common Life.’

He had been the means, under God, of awakening a new life in the souls of many of the clergy; and besides this, other devout servants of God drew closer to him; and now that he could himself no longer preach openly as aforetime, he called upon them to carry on the good work he had begun—assisting them by his means when needed. Such were Florentius Radewin, John Gronde, John Brinderink, and others. He urged other educated men to enter the ministry, and labour for the good of souls. Already to a great extent he had provided schools in many places where they were wanted, that the young might early be taught and trained in the fear of God. And, where large public schools did exist, he seems to have been on most intimate terms with the head-masters, and taken great interest in such of their scholars as shewed signs of sincere piety and ability. He often invited them, says à Kempis, to his house, both for counsel and to hear the Word of God read to them, that they might be instructed in the way of Life.

Both Gerard and those who were associated with him in his labours paid much attention to this, and encouraged them in every likely way they could. Gerard had an admirable way of winning their affections in his conversation; and a considerable alteration for the better was effected in the conduct of many of them; for they became willing to embrace an humble and laborious life, so that they might live unto God, rather than enjoy all the vanities and luxuries of the world. Hence a great number of promising youths and poor clerks had flocked to him from all parts—John à Kempis, Thomas's elder brother, being of the number—who by his means partly

received their education free of charge; while at the same time he shewed them that they must try and do something for themselves and not altogether live on the charity or bounty of others; for he set every one a work to do, which generally was to copy out portions of the sacred Scriptures, pieces of devotion, or the writings of some ancient author. Then he paid them the just price for what they had written; but, as à Kempis tells us—and the same plan seems to have been continued in his day too—Gerard did not usually pay them the whole at once, but distributed part of it at a time, so that they might have the excuse of frequently coming to him, and having access to him for the payment of their money, when he took the opportunity of impressing upon them the value and beauty of a holy life, and exhorting them to give themselves to Christ their Lord and Saviour. And, adds à Kempis, in proportion as they willingly listened to the teaching of the Master so much the more did they seem to increase and abound in beneficent acts of piety. Gerard delighted to speak thus intimately more to the simple-minded and to those who were teachable, than to the wise of this world; because the innocent and needy were for the most part more quickly admitted to the counsels of God, than the sagacious who trusted in their own wisdom.

Gerard had been a great advocate for earnest Christians associating and banding themselves together in companies; and he advised many of those who had been convinced by his preaching and had turned to Christ, to live together if they were single, and could conveniently do so, in one house for mutual help, comfort, and encouragement. He had regard also to the

younger women, and purchased a house for them at Deventer where they might live together, and where they were to learn to employ their time usefully in spinning, weaving, sewing, and other women's work, till called to occupy places in the world. These persons were to call themselves *Brothers* and *Sisters*: and were to be sure to earn their livelihood by the work of their own hands. He would suffer none to beg at the doors of better people, or to go from house to house out of curiosity; but persuaded them to stay at home and mind their own business, according to the apostolic rule: and it must further be observed that though he urged them to engage heartily in whatever work they undertook, and do it to the best of their ability, he would have none of them to attend to their external work or duties in such a way that it would be a hindrance to their devotions, and their service to Christ.

Many of Gerard's followers, and the Brothers and Sisters of Common Life in Deventer and elsewhere, were at first often subjected to persecution; and after having paid a visit to Ruysbroek, a very saintly man, who was the head of a humble monastery at Grünthal, he resolved to found a monastery for some of the more devout of the Brothers of Common Life, as a centre and protection for the rest, and as an example of what Christians living together in this manner should be. Yet he could not proceed with the work at once, though he frequently talked about it. He had already spent and employed his ample fortune in carrying on those acts of usefulness and devotion, which had so much engaged his soul, and now he seemed to lack the means for carrying out this additional work which he longed to accomplish.

But while waiting, and trusting that Providence would open the way and provide means for its accomplishment, a strange ordering of events led to it. The terrible plague broke out in Deventer, and he at once busied himself in giving diligent attendance on the stricken, ministering fearlessly both to their bodily comforts and to their spiritual welfare. One day whilst thus employed, word was brought to him that a faithful, pious, and wealthy friend of his, Lambert Stuerman, had been seized with the raging pestilence; and Gerard, who was not inexperienced in the art of medicine, hastened intrepidly to his side for the purpose of administering consolation and help. And Gerard felt more especially the necessity of going to him when he sent, and most pressingly asked him to come, since he had expressed himself as desirous to follow Gerard's counsel in the making of his will; and the consequence of this was that the dying man left and bequeathed a large sum of money for at once founding a monastery for a new community of Canons Regular, according to Gerard's directions.

Here then was the very object of Gerard's earnest wish within sight of being realised; but, as it has happened in many other like cases—such are the mysterious ways of Providence—he himself was taken away before it could be accomplished. Nay, no sooner was he conscious that the prayer of his soul had been granted, than God called him hence. He himself took the plague from attending his friend; and, as it is recorded, he felt the pestilential poison gradually stealing up through the nerves and veins of his fingers till it affected him inwardly, and up through his arms till it reached his chest, and was thus surely creeping to his vital parts. Therefore, seeing that his

end was come, he returned to his house, and called all the devout Fathers together—Florentius the Rector, and the rest of the Clerks (*clerici*) and Brethren of the Congregation at Deventer; and as they stood around him, he told them that his dissolution was nigh at hand, because he felt from the virulency of the corrupting poison in his system that he could not possibly recover. He bore his sufferings with great patience. He asked for and received the Holy Sacrament; and after speaking further about his departure, the dying reformer said, 'God grant that I may find rest after my death, since for the love of Him I have laboured, written, and preached.'

Seeing and hearing these things, they who stood around him were all sorely distressed, and with wounded hearts they sobbed aloud; with tears and lamentations they also cried out, 'Oh much beloved Master, oh most faithful Father and protector, what shall we do in the future? To whom shall we turn when thou art taken from us? For the devotion of the whole country, which was revived by thee, and began to flourish again under the wings of thy protection, will die when thou art gone. For every one will necessarily return to his own way by the which he came, when we have no one to defend us against those that rise up against us, or to fight for us. Those mendicants will drive us from the land, and they will vex our lives with the worst injuries they can do against us, when there is no one to withstand them, and close their wicked mouths.' The pious and compassionate Master, seeing the grief of his sons at the thought of his departure, consoled them, and exhorted them thus:—

‘Have faith in God, most beloved, and do not fear the reproaches of worldly men. Remain steadfast in your holy resolution ; the Lord will be with you in this place. For man will not be able to overthrow that which God has decreed to accomplish. . . . And behold there is Florentius, my beloved disciple, in whom verily the Holy Spirit rests : he shall be your Father and ruler. Hold him in my place, hear him, and obey his counsel.’ And having thus kindly consoled his disciples, who were greatly overcome with much sorrow, he assured them that the help of God would be with them.

When the sad tidings of his death went forth among the people, multitudes of the faithful assembled to honour the burial of so loving and devout a Master ; and the religious Brothers and Sisters shed many tears. He was interred with great solemnity in the Church of St Mary, which had frequently rung with his loving voice when he preached the Word of God.

CHAPTER IV.

The Origin of the Brothers of Common Life—The Progress of à Kempis—
Spiritual Conferences among the Brothers—The Illness of à Kempis—
His Account of Everard the Physician.

THE commencement of 'the Brothers of Common Life,' as a Confraternity, was in a very simple and natural way. It seemed to grow out of the necessities of the case. There was a call for it. A combination of those who were piously disposed and like-minded was not only desirable but needed for their mutual support, for their encouragement and edification, and for the keeping up a certain rule and discipline of life.

It may be well to remark, however, that the suggestion of a Brotherhood did not come from Gerard in the first instance, though he had brought all matters together, ready for it. It originated simply enough in this way. The number of copyists had increased: and consequently expenses had also increased: so on a certain occasion, when Gerard was anxiously considering how he should provide necessary food and clothing for all those who were thus disposed to employ their time, Master Florentius Radewin, who had been converted by Gerard, and since then had become one of the vicars of Deventer, made a proposition by chance, as it would appear, to him in these terms, saying: 'Beloved master, what harm will arise if these clerics engaged in writing, and I, should, with a good will, place the amount which we

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earn in one common purse, to expend as needed, and live equally alike in common?' 'In a Community?' In a Community?' again inquired Gerard; 'that would be like the Order of Mendicants, and they would not tolerate it, but would endeavour to resist it with all their power; and it would set them altogether in opposition to us.' To which Florentius replied, 'But what is to prevent us making the trial? Perhaps God might vouchsafe to us that which would be to our advantage.' Then Master Gerard deliberated a little while within himself, says the Chronicler of Windesheim, and at last said, 'In God's name, then, let us begin. I will be your advocate and your faithful protector against all the adversaries that shall rise up against you and try to hinder you.' Receiving his permission to make the attempt, therefore, and such a consolatory promise of support, the devout Florentius gathered the young clerics together, and made the proposal to them, whether they would be willing to place the price which they each received weekly for what they wrote into one common fund, and live a common life together, in the name of God. To this they readily assented with unwonted gladness of soul, and with the felicity of those who rejoice in prosperous times.

Then the devout Father Florentius, dwelling with his priests and clerics in common life, prescribed, by the counsel of Master Gerard, the form and rules of living alike in their Community,—the modes, places, and times of labouring, watching, sleeping, praying, reading, and refreshing the body; and how other matters concerning their welfare should be settled for the time to come. Having then fully and wisely established themselves, and being joined together in holy concord, they furnished to

the whole religious world, says the writer from whose work these particulars are derived, to both men and women living in the world also, the pattern of Apostolic life, and a complete example of Evangelical perfection, so that the eyes of all men were fixed upon them with astonishment, since their lives were renowned for their sanctity.

After this manner therefore, and from this beginning, all the devout Congregations of the Brothers of Common Life, both Priests and Clerics, and of the Sisters now spread abroad throughout the greater part of Germany, are well known to have taken their rise. And without making any solemn vow like the monks and nuns, they desired with their whole hearts to be for ever the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, who for their sake became poor; and to live in true obedience, chastity, and poverty, after the manner of many of the primitive Christians, 'who were of one heart and of one soul,' 'and had all things common.'

The years Thomas à Kempis spent at Deventer, as he passed from youth to early manhood, were of momentous value, and were occupied in a regular routine of daily duties. And though one day was much like another, with little variation, they were happy days to him, full of a delicious enthusiasm for devotion; he was eager and persevering in the acquisition of learning that he might the better fit himself for God's service; and filling up his leisure moments in transcribing some good manuscript, that he might in some measure repay the kindness of his benefactors, there was a joy in his toil; for he felt that he was beginning the business of life in earnest, and was getting on, 'something attempted,

something done;’ and a glow of satisfaction and thankfulness often filled his breast. Associated with others of a like mind, he had the gentle stimulus of emulation to urge him on, and the approval and encouragement of those who took an interest in his welfare. His writing was much admired, for he took great pains to form a good hand, and make his letters and words neatly and accurately. His proficiency in the Latin tongue also was truly praiseworthy, not only in the readiness and accuracy with which he was able to translate it, but also in composing Latin out of his mother tongue; the which proved of great service to him afterwards, as it enabled him to read the Bible—then in Latin—and the works of the Fathers, and other learned books, with facility, as well as to turn into fair Latin the many and various works that he composed.

He was also daily gaining a deeper acquaintance with the Word of God, and a better comprehension of the will of God therein revealed, not only by listening to the instructions, expositions, and set discourses of earnest preachers and spiritual masters, but by a loving and diligent study and perusal of the Holy Word for himself, and by the friendly conferences and discussions which were constantly held with the devout Brethren, upon one portion or another. For here it may be a fitting place to mention, that it was a custom among the younger Brothers of Common Life to have, not only stated conferences with their appointed Superiors for discourse about the way of Life, and for the advancement of piety, but also occasional entertainments or colloquies among themselves, of a more private and less formal character, but having the same end in view,

and at which but two or three were present. Thomas à Kempis was a great promoter and lover of these little gatherings, and so also was his beloved contemporary Lubert Berner, a person of inflamed devotion, and of a most pleasant and cheerful conversation, and whose frequent saying was—when any coldness of heart seemed to come upon him or upon any of his near associates, or when he longed for holy communion with devout and kindred souls, or had a mind to engage in spiritual discourse, from something borne in upon his mind—'Come, brother, let us warm one another,' or, he would exclaim with fervent affection, 'When, oh when shall we again be inflamed, or set on fire!'¹

These were occasions of true delight, when such pious souls tasted the sweetness of maintaining godly fellowship one with another; for so earnestly were they affected in these seasons of sacred intercourse that their hearts glowed within them, whilst they conferred together about Christ their dear Lord and what He had said unto them, as also concerning their 'hope of glory,' to be obtained through Him. For so much was this the case that, sometimes forgetting themselves, and the accustomed hour of repose, they tarried together till near midnight, being kept awake with the fire of devotion kindled within them, sweetly melting their souls into the conscious love of God and the earnest desire to be right resolute in diligently keeping His commandments. Thus they made experiments for themselves, as Thomas à Kempis has it, of the Psalmist's words—proving the truth of what he said in their own persons

¹ 'Quando, quando volumus nos iterum ignire?' (Thom. à Kemp. *Vita Lub. Bern.*, no. v. sec. 16, p. 78.)

—‘Thy word burneth exceedingly, and Thy servant loveth it:’ as it is according to the Vulgate. There are those who understand what is here meant, and who, like Thomas à Kempis and his devout companions, have felt the fire kindling within them—who have experienced the warmth of a holy fervour pervading their souls, when in company with two or three others they have been engaged in reading the Holy Scriptures in a reverent and prayerful spirit of inquiry to know what the will of God is; the which is a sufficient testimony to sincere Christians that there is a way of studying, and conferring together upon the Word of God to ascertain its sense and inner spiritual significance, so as to inflame the soul with fervent desires, till it works effectually in them that believe.

In the first chapter of the ‘Soliloquy of the Soul,’ there is an evident allusion to an interesting episode, which shows how earnestly desirous Thomas à Kempis was, probably at this period, to learn from one of the elder Brothers more of the interior life, and the true secret of holding communion with God. Regarding Thomas as the inquirer, we have a colloquy narrated which he had with one who had had some experience in Divine things. Whether by accident, or as a privileged person who was permitted to have access to this individual in the season of devotion, à Kempis appears to have heard the devout breathings of his pious soul as he poured out his heart in fervent meditation and prayer. The words to which he had listened, and which led to the inquiry that succeeds were treasured up, and afterwards adapted so as to form the beginning of one of his much valued devotional works. They are as follows:—

O my God, Thou art my only good. Thou alone art good and sweet. To speak of Thee is sweet to them that love Thee, to think of Thee is pleasant to the Devout, whose heart is not in the world, but is hidden with Thee in Heaven.

So that Thou art to him the only true rest, and inward sweetness; and that he may not be daily disquieted here, where false desire tempts him.

My God how is it at heart with him who burns with love of Thee? What manner of joy is his, whom no vanity of the creatures delights?

Does not his voice sing in the Psalm, from which I have taken the beginning of my speech, after this manner: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and what have I desired on earth beside Thee?'

There is apparently a slight pause, and à Kempis breaks in, and says:—

Oh! holy and devout soul, hanging upon God, what is this that I hear from thee? What is this that thou sayest? Do all things in heaven and earth seem small to thee?

The reply comes:—

Yea, all things are small to me.

The sacred converse is then at some length continued. There was a shrinking on the part of his friend—as it is with all true souls—to lay bare to any other eye but God's the inmost life of his heart, hitherto spent in the privacy of his chamber, or kept secret from others. And with the idea of diverting Thomas from his desire to learn what had been known to God only, of the depth of that sweet and hidden communion he had held with Him, he bids à Kempis to address himself to God, and seek to know from Him. A Kempis having acknowledged that there is a life with God that should be kept hid from the world, knowing that it is

destructive of its freshness and reality to expose it to the gaze of idle and captious curiosity, is still unwilling to be put off, and perseveres in his request with reverent boldness; he earnestly longs to draw nearer to God; he is covetous to know more of the art of holding devout intercourse with the most High from one who has much excelled in it. And with a sacred and yearning importunity he once more entreats his friend to grant him the favour he asks, and thus again pleads with him :—

Why delayest thou? Do satisfy him that so eagerly desireth, and open the door to a friend, knocking now for the third time.

Speak beloved of the Beloved, and yet do not overlook me. If thou art not able to speak of Him as He is, speak of Him, however, as best thou canst.

For who can speak of Him, as He is; and who can understand him that should so speak? Therefore if thou canst not speak of Him as He is in Himself, say, at least, what He doth in thee.

Seeing that à Kempis will not be persuaded to leave him in peace until he has given him some help towards attaining the interior life with God, this pious friend at last is inclined to yield to his holy persistency, and thinks that he may be of service to the useful devotee, and that God may not be displeased at his revealing to him, for his soul's welfare, the blessed secret of his hidden life whereby God is brought nearer to him, and he to God; and therefore is willing to make the attempt, though he feels that he is all the while unable to do this worthily enough, that his best efforts will come short of the reality of that communion, and therefore it is with a feeling of hesitation he again says:—

Why hast thou imposed this burden upon me? For to speak thereof is a task beyond me until I enter the sanctuary of God, and understand. Why wouldst thou know what I can hardly speak about.

The holy contention between these two devout friends at last ends, and they come to an understanding to seek the Lord together, and to wait till he vouchsafes in some way to acknowledge them.

And now it would appear that a solemn silence was kept for awhile. They wait upon God. They listen and hearken for the voice of God, to hear what He will say unto them. And as they wait in stillness at the footstool of grace, the words of God Himself, declaring His everlasting Name and Being, are borne in upon their souls in some mysterious manner; whether audibly to both we know not, but the same words seem to come to both alike.

Such high and sacred converse between earnest and loving hearts is much to be valued and ever to be remembered. It often marks an epoch in the spiritual life, and is not unfrequently the commencement of a closer walk with God; the making up of the mind to live for the future more with God and for God, with a resolute determination to be all that He would have us to be, and to do all that He would have us to do. In the preface to the book from which the above colloquy is taken, à Kempis intimates that he has recorded what he wished to store up, that in time of need he might find suitable matter to refresh himself when overcome by weariness or clouded by sorrow. And it seems probable that the fervour and influence of the conversation we have before us, left its impression upon him, was

often recalled to his mind, and not unfrequently incited him to the keeping up the interior life with God.

I have said that à Kempis was well and fully employed day after day; that time passed pleasantly and profitably with him whilst there was little to disturb the smooth tenor of his outward life. There were, however, some few changes and incidents, that from time to time broke in upon the regular routine of the daily tasks and duties which occupied him and the frequently recurring exercises of devotion. Many of the Brothers one after another left them, and were removed to other places, or were advanced from the Brother-houses at Deventer to be Canons Regular, or were called to assist in the establishment of new houses rising up in various parts. The departure of a Brother, again and again, whilst à Kempis was staying with them, caused for the time some little excitement—for great was the fraternal charity that existed among them; but still whilst they missed their sweet presence and society, it served to enlarge their sympathies and awaken new and pleasing interests. These Brothers were going forth into the world, equipped for the service of their Lord, to be witnesses for Christ: and each fresh sphere to which they went was an additional centre of new life to which those left behind might turn. Moreover, other young men were coming fresh into their ranks, and supplying the vacant places of those who had left, which again caused new interests to arise.

Then, again, during à Kempis's stay among the Brothers at Deventer, a grievous pestilence broke out once or twice in the city and the surrounding neighbourhood, and during the last two years he was there

it raged so violently that it carried off no less than ten of the Brothers out of the larger or new house of Florentius, obliging him to remove with the rest of the household to Amersford for a time, though it seems to have spared the inhabitants of the older and smaller house where à Kempis resided. Among those who died were two or three that à Kempis particularly loved and esteemed, and whose deaths seem to have made a great impression upon him, since it wholly determined him to give himself up for the remainder of his days to a religious life.

A Kempis himself, also on one occasion, whether earlier or later on is not recorded, fell seriously ill. It does not appear what his sickness was, but though it probably did not proceed from the epidemic which prevailed at one time or another, yet it was of so dangerous a character that his life seems to have been in peril, so much so that Florentius called in the aid of a worthy friend of his, who was skilful as a physician, though he had become a clergyman; the name of this person was Everard de Eza, curé of Almelo, a small town about twenty-two miles from Deventer. This illness, whatever it was, seems to have been a lingering one, or to have returned upon him frequently, so that it proved a great trial to à Kempis, and often depressed him.¹ It did not, however, damp his love and devotion to Christ, but served rather to draw him nearer to his dear Lord, since it called forth in larger measure the exercise of faith in the superintending care and goodness of the Almighty. When he came near, once and again, to the

¹ See the *Chronicles* by Thomas à Kempis, continued after those of St Agnes, chap. vii. p. 163.

dark valley and shadow of death, it led him, while yet a young man, to reflect upon the uncertainty of life; and as for awhile he knew not whether he should be summoned hence, or spared, he felt the more resolved in his mind that should God raise him up again to health and strength, his life should be devoted to Him and to His service. He could not, however, always keep his mind collected: anxious thoughts would arise at times, and his sickness brought him very low. Nevertheless, he was not left desolate; there were loving friends about him that ministered to his necessities with gentle hands and tender hearts. But still it was a season to be much remembered by him, and we naturally look for some traces of it in his works.

It would be interesting to know what his thoughts were at this time when God was thus dealing with his soul, and bringing him early near to Himself, through the furnace of affliction. It is deemed very probable that in one or two of the earlier chapters of his 'Soliloquy of the Soul,' he describes the feelings and sentiments which pervaded his mind during the period of his illness, which, being then put down in a rough draft, he afterwards corrected and amended when he was induced to collect a number of such papers together, some years later, and embody them in a complete treatise. For though it is not expressly named when the words were written, or to what particular event or period of his early history they belong, they do nevertheless fit in most suitably with this season of sickness. And here, I may say—speaking generally—that it would be a pity to be deprived of knowing the occasions when some of his very beautiful and salutary meditations were brought

forth at special moments of his life, when his soul was moved to utterance and to find some vent for its pious emotions, because the times to which they belong are not exactly specified, when by a little consideration of the subjects they can be adjusted in many instances to their proper places, without much fear of going very far wrong.

And here I must make a few observations about the 'Soliloquy of the Soul,' from which I have already made some extracts. If we may judge from what is said, it seems probable, that this treatise of Thomas à Kempis was written before the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi;' that it was one of his earliest productions, and contains the devout outpourings and aspirations of his soul, his meditations, experiences, and reflections in religion, as they arose from time to time during his latter years at Deventer and his first years at Mount St Agnes. His contemporary biographer makes mention of the work before any of the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' And he does this in such a manner as to lead us to the conclusion I have just stated. Probably at the suggestion, and by the desire and help of his brother John, he was in the first instance induced to make them known for the benefit of others, that the work might be as a guide or manual of spiritual direction, for assisting other Christian pilgrims when passing through like trials or conditions of soul. And this was done without any desire or aim that such devout papers might be known as the outcome of his own heart rather than of any other person.

In confirmation of this, the Contemporaneous bio-

grapher of à Kempis leads us to the conclusion that the expressions contained in the 'Soliloquy' were in truth drawn from his experience, for thus he speaks of him: 'And because *he began in early years* to gather riches, not the perishing riches of unrighteousness, but durable substance, and to lay up treasures of wisdom and righteousness, therefore he obtained a good name, that was as most precious ointment. And those words of the prophet were fulfilled in him, which say, "Blessed is the man that shall bear the yoke of the Lord from his youth up. He shall sit alone and hold his peace; because he hath lifted himself above himself."¹ For that this was verily fulfilled in him, *is plainly to be seen in several of his treatises, and especially in that of the "Soliloquy of the Soul,"* which he composed; wherein Christ, the Bridegroom, is speaking with his soul, as it were to His bride. And there it may be seen, how he sat solitary and kept silence, because he had borne this yoke of Christ from his youth, and how sitting thus alone, he lifted himself *above himself.*'²

Thomas à Kempis also in his preface to the 'Soliloquy' intimates that what is written is applicable to the author, then anonymous; for, after alluding to the peculiar style of composition he has adopted, he speaks in deprecating tones of his ability for writing, and says in his own quaint but pleasing fashion:—'I ask, then, none of my readers to be moved to wrath with the writer, because it hath pleased him to discourse after this manner with himself. Let him pardon also the imperfection of composition, and the simplicity of diction,

¹ Lam. iii. 27, 28.

² *Biog. Synchr. Vita et opera Thom. à Kemp.* edit. Nuremb. 1494.

considering with himself that not things artificially devised, but pure and simple, are the more pleasing to God.' And then he concludes his preface with an address to God, to accept the work, imperfect though he acknowledges it to be; and with a beautiful prayer, in which his love for the Word of God shines forth, he entreats that he may be blessed with a tranquil mind, so as inwardly to receive its divine truths. I cannot omit therefore giving the whole of it here, since it will be valued by many:—

And since human judgments, however probable, are apt to err, I, a suppliant disciple, have recourse to Thee, O Omnipotent God, and Father of Lights, and present this Soliloquy before Thee, that Thou mayest approve what is worthy, blame what is amiss, and shew me, or some other faithful servant, those things displeasing to Thee, that they may be more correctly and clearly set forth.

And I entreat Thee also, O Holy Father, vouchsafe to me, the least of Thy servants, time and opportunity for tarrying in the most pleasant pastures of the Holy Scriptures, which are and will be my most cherished delight, until the day of Eternity dawns, and the shadow of mortality is gone down. Remove from me useless cares, temporal loves, hurtful passions, and other causes that keep me back from the desired rest. For it behoves the mind to be free and tranquil which desires to meditate on things inward and divine. That I may, therefore, be enabled to attain to such a state of mind, graciously pour out upon me, and fill me with the benediction of Thy heavenly sweetness, so that I may speak of Thy glory, and obtain some grace of spiritual consolation for myself.¹

For the various reasons given above then, the 'Soliloquy of the Soul' may be regarded as a veiled autobiographical account of à Kempis's earlier interior

¹ *Prologus in Soliloquium Animæ.*

life, its lights and shades, its joys and sorrows, its fears and aspirations.

I will only here, in passing, give a few words from this book, which evidently relate to the period of his sickness :—

It is no pleasure to me to live, because misery presses on every side. An evil conscience makes a man fear to die, because he cannot answer to God for one act in a thousand. Unlike to this trepidation is the word of the Prophet, when he says : ‘My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.’

O Lord God of my salvation, give me a good end of my life, and prolong not the days of my mourning. Sorrowful came I into this prison, and I shall not go hence without fear.

Long appears this life to me, but this comes from frequent misery and sadness. For in fact it is not long, for time passes away swifter than the wind. But to him who is afflicted with sorrow and pain, all time is long, and he reckons a day as a year. Therefore is this life wearisome to me, and it afflicts me the more grievously the more truly I know each of its miseries. And although some seasons of consolation and gladness intervene, yet it behoves me to consider whether they are from God or not.

If from God, I gladly accept them ; but how long they will continue I know not. Yet however short they are, they please and delight me. Would, my God, they flowed in more largely, and did not remain with me but some short hours.

But those that are not from God are worthless, and will quickly perish, although in appearance they seem pleasant and sweet. Thus this life passes away, always mixed with good and evil.

As long then as I am in this world, I am a poor pilgrim.¹ I cannot say that it satisfies me, because there is not a sufficiency of good in this present life ; but Thou, in Whom I believe, art my Good for which I long.

The wearisome days of a lingering sickness were

¹ *Pauper peregrinus sum.* Thomas speaks of himself as ‘Frater Peregrinus,’ in the prologue of his *Sermons to Novices*.

peculiarly trying to this young athlete in the Kingdom of Christ, and he had need to strengthen himself continually in God. It seemed as if God were chastening him as a son whom He had received, and had designed to fit for doing a peculiar work for Him. The sickness was doubtless sanctified to his spiritual advancement, since he sought God in it, and desired to be purified from all earthly attachments, and committed himself wholly to the disposal of the Divine Will, humbling and condemning himself. Hear, however, how he mourns in his prayer, as if deeply troubled in spirit :—

The severity of pain suffers me not to remain silent. For why do I remain here longer? I know not even that I shall be well here. I improve too slowly; and would that I did not feel so weary.

What a [good thing Thou wouldst do to me, O Lord, if Thou wouldst shortly take me hence, lest it should become worse with me. My life is breathed forth with pain, and does not amend under treatment.

Since Thou delayest, I do not amend thereby, but even abuse Thy long-suffering. And when Thou correctest, I hardly endure it, because Thou pursuest as it were but dry stubble.

But, O Good Lord, do not cry out against me in Thine anger, ‘Cut down the tree, and cast it into the fire.’ I accuse my infirmity before Thee, that Thou mayest pardon me when I confess.

It is for me to accuse myself, for Thee to forgive. It is for me to weep and grieve bitterly, and for Thee mercifully to comfort me. Either then, O Lord God, grant me more grace in this life, or take me quickly from this world, lest the cleft be made worse. For to live long, and not to amend one’s life, is but to heap up punishment.

There are more such words, but I refrain from further quotations. During this period of lengthened sickness the Curé of St Almelo visited him frequently,

and spoke words of spiritual comfort and divine wisdom to him, as well as prescribed for his bodily health, for like Luke, the beloved Physician, he ministered to the wants of the soul, as well as attended to the cure of the body, and gave the young man much holy and affectionate advice, to strengthen his hope in God, and his resolution to persevere in holiness of life, should his heavenly Father mercifully raise him up again.

Thomas à Kempis long remembered his kindness; and many years afterwards, when the good and benevolent man died, he speaks of him with grateful reverence, and gives us some interesting particulars of his life, which I will here relate instead of later on, when Thomas records his death.

In the year 1404, on April 1, the Reverend Master Everard de Eza died. He frequently undertook, out of kindness, the healing of many sick persons, and especially of the poor, free of charge. He was also the founder, and provided the means for the support, of the new monastery of Canons Regular, called 'the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Wood,' near Northorn, and lived in connection with the Brethren. An account of the consecration of the chapel of this monastery is given by à Kempis in a previous chapter of the 'Chronicles,' and we are there told that Everard caused several clerks (clerici) living with him to be invested as canons in the said monastery. This man, continues à Kempis, was held in great repute as a physician, was honoured by the better class, feared by the worldly, beloved by the religious, and was greatly famed for some distance throughout the whole country round about. He was an intimate friend of Florentius, the Vicar of Deventer, and

was pleased when called upon to visit him, and was not unfrequently present with him during the seasons of his illness, and, skilfully prescribing for him, wrought his cure. He was wont to refer to this, because, he said, it seemed above human nature that a man of so debilitated a frame could have lived so long if it had not been for God's sustaining providence. They frequently renewed their acquaintance and mutually benefited each other, so that they appeared to be as two luminaries in the world, and as brethren dwelling together in unity, and comforting one another.

But it was not always so. Far otherwise. Thomas à Kempis tells us how his conversion was begun, and how, by God's co-operating grace, it was fully confirmed to the effecting of his salvation. It was on this wise: When the venerable Gerard the Great preached the Word of God, not only in Deventer, but in the country round about, Everard heard of his fame, and seems to have been incensed by it, for, puffed up with the wisdom of the world, he hastened to be present on one occasion when Gerard preached, not out of love, but for the sake of curiosity, wishing to ascertain what his doctrines were, and whether his preaching was in accordance with his fame; and not, therefore, because he thirsted for righteousness, but rather because he desired to get some occasion to find fault with the discourse. He did not, therefore, appear openly in the congregation among the simple folks, but kept himself hidden, as it were, behind a pillar.

But behold, the Almighty, Who knoweth the hearts of men, and from whose face no one can hide himself, filled the discourse of the preacher with sharp arrows

for him, which secretly pierced the heart of the critical auditor, and so filled him with compunction that, casting away the wantonness of his former vanity and pride, he soon became a devout disciple of the preacher. For when the discourse was ended, he went to the man of God and told him how the Lord had dealt with him; by what manner he had endeavoured to conceal himself from observation; and how he now desired the preacher to look into the hidden places of his heart, and know his most secret thoughts. Master Gerard therefore received him affectionately, and confirmed him in his resolution to lead a new life, until at length he became a companion and coadjutor in preaching the Gospel. But it was not long after his conversion that Master Gerard took his departure to the Lord.

After his death, the old enemy endeavoured to excite not a little animosity against the devout disciples, but the grace of God abounded towards them, giving them patience and constancy. And when Master Everard, whose conversion was not yet known to many of the 'devotees' at Deventer, wished at the first to join himself to the disciples of Christ dwelling in the house of Florentius, the Brethren were greatly troubled at beholding his face. For it appears that Everard had used violence against some of them aforetime, and a report of his bitter animosity filled their hearts with fear, as if his coming among them foreboded some evil; and, as Thomas relates the circumstance, they took to flight, as lambs before the wolf, and rushed to certain hiding-places in the house. Master Florentius also was afraid of him, not knowing his intention for he had formerly been extremely harsh to some of the devout Brethren,

and had opposed them. Therefore he said to Father Florentius, 'Why is it that the Brethren fly away in this manner?' The other replied, 'Because they know not for what intent thou comest.' Then said Everard to him, 'I come to you that I may learn to amend my life.'

Florentius evidently doubted his sincerity, and held back as if he suspected that it was but some crafty design of his to get the Brethren into his power; and therefore he gave him no encouragement. After some further parley, Master Everard at length spoke of his serious determination, and with some protestation said, 'If you do not believe my word, at least believe my actions. Accommodate me with a chamber among you for a time, as I desire, and prove me during that period what spirit I am of.' The Brethren therefore at length received him among them, and appointed him a chamber; and there he lived for some length of time in good report, giving evident proof of his being fully converted; and after tarrying among them many days, he became learned in the law of the Lord and in the sacred Scriptures, as in like manner he had been aforetime learned and celebrated in the art of medicine.

At length he began to comprehend what the will of the Lord was respecting himself, and how he was to serve Him, and then began to exercise his heavenly vocation. Being instructed both by the example and counsels of Florentius, he took his departure, and began to gather pious clerics and laymen at his own house at Almelo after the pattern set him in the Brother-house at Deventer, and lived with them many years in like holy discipline. By God's help also he procured a site upon which to

build the monastery before-named ; and when he had placed several of the Brethren there, he made large gifts of property to it to meet the expenses, as well as of gold and silver things, books, and other necessary articles for use. The monastery was founded in 1394, just ten years after the death of Gerard, and ten years before his own death. He was buried in his own church at Almelo, where he had preached to the people many years, leaving behind him a good remembrance among the 'devotees,' whom he paternally loved and cherished.¹

Such is the short record which à Kempis gives of Everard de Eza, who won a lasting regard in his heart. In speaking of him as his benefactor, he adds that he not only cured him, but had done this in such wise that for a long time afterwards he had not been oppressed with the like sickness.

Gradually à Kempis recovered his health and resumed his former occupations, joining as aforetime in the religious services of the Brotherhood. His illness had however been sanctified to his advancement in Godliness, and was one of the means used by God to prepare his servant for future usefulness.

¹ See Chronicles, by Thomas à Kempis, following those of Mt. St Agnes, but not immediately connected with the monastery.

CHAPTER V.

Memoirs of Florentius Radewin by à Kempis—Sketches also of the Lives of John de Gronde and of John Brinckerinck.

WHILST writing on that portion of the life of Thomas à Kempis which he spent at Deventer, I must narrate the account which he gives us of the Life of Father FLORENTIUS RADEWIN, who did more than any one to form his spiritual character, to establish him in an entire devotion of himself to God, and to urge him to the attainment of Christian perfection.

Though Gerard the Great was the originator of the great Spiritual revival, and the Founder of 'the Brothers of Common Life,' Florentius was not merely his *Fidus Achates* and successor, but the mainspring and soul of these religious Communities to which Thomas à Kempis belonged for more than seventy years. He was the flower and model of the devout life to which all the Brethren looked up, and by whom they were continually incited to great endeavours after a conformity to the likeness of Christ. 'The apostolic simple-mindedness and dignity,' says one, 'the urbanity, gentleness, and self-sacrificing activity for the common weal which characterises this person, inspired Thomas with a boundless admiration for him. Of this, in his life of Florentius, itself the noblest monument of affectionate reverence for

the departed, he relates many characteristic and affecting traits.' For in the quaint Prologue with which Thomas introduces his life, he thus speaks of him—

It seems to me, however, unworthy though I be, a shameful and ungrateful thing, that I should refrain from speaking of the virtues of so beloved a Father, who was so serviceable in his life to myself and many others; who first led me to God, and at length guided me to the refuge of the monastery. Wherefore, as a deed of gratitude, and as a sweet memorial of him, I willingly repay him this good office, by composing this little work after his death.

Let my great love of the Reverend Father be some excuse, continues à Kempis, for presuming upon the work, since it is my wish that his memory may always and everywhere flourish among the 'Devotees.' May the Lord Jesus, who did not despise the two mites of the poor widow, hereafter reward my little self, because with pious intention I cast of my hand into His treasury, leaving higher things to the more learned. Knowing my own littleness, I submit to the correction of greater men. I beseech you, let your devout minds help me by prayer, and should you derive any edification from reading these writings, praise God for all His gifts, and be thankful even for small ones.

Florentius, whose life à Kempis now relates, was born at Leerdam in the year 1350, of respectable and opulent parents. His Father's name was Radewin; and according to the manner of writing biography in those days, à Kempis adopts the method, which it will be remembered the biographers of à Kempis followed respecting him, of expatiating upon his character from the names he bore.

The circumstance which more immediately led him to decided serious thoughts about religion and to devoting himself to God's service, was a merciful deliverance from an impending death. And under a deep impres-

sion that God had graciously spared his life, he attended the ministry of Gerard Groote when he came to Deventer, and diligently listening to his voice, he resolved to forsake the delusive honours of the world, and become a humble follower of Christ. And, continues à Kempis—

Desiring, therefore, to have more familiar intercourse with Gerard, and seeing that he had a great zeal for souls, Florentius delayed not to seek an interview, confided in his reverence; and told to him in order, as to the friend and trusted servant of God, that which inwardly moved him. He was joyfully welcomed, the bosom of charity was opened to him, the desired intercourse was afforded him, and a reason was accorded concerning whatsoever matters he desired to be informed upon. Thus brought together they sweetly discoursed of the things that pertain to salvation; and the hearts of both of them burned with celestial aspirations; all earthly things grew vile; and the good counsels concerning the Divine service were confirmed. Hereupon those are united in the love of the brotherhood, who, in the holy conversation they propose to themselves, earnestly desire a country in the Lord. And the manifold grace of God was so present with them, that they not only advanced their own salvation, but that of their neighbours. For there were added to them, as a solace of fuller joy, and as an ornament of the house of our God, certain learned and eloquent men, who, powerfully inflamed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, chose firmly to adhere to the footsteps of Christ, and through the contempt of worldly things, and a brave warfare against vice, to pass to eternal good.¹

And when the most sweet south wind of Divine love, continues à Kempis in another chapter, blew more frequently upon the little garden of the heart of Florentius, which was watered with his tears, he began to be very fruitful in great devotion, and to be incited with a pious emulation to draw others from the pollution of sin. He took great pains, therefore, to gain as spiritual Brothers those who formerly he used to delight to have as worldly companions, when engaged in the study of literature. For with the

¹ *Thom. a Kemp. Vita Florentii*, cap. vii. sec. 1, 2.

same fire with which he himself was inflamed, and with the same light with which he himself was illuminated by God, he hastened to instruct those who came to him with lucid words and examples. He therefore persuaded both clerics and laymen willingly to yield themselves up to the service of God, to shun corrupt intercourse, to seize every opportunity of hearing the word of God, to imitate the humility of Christ, and to look at the life of the Saints for an example thereof, seeing that by the virtue of continence and the precepts of the Lord, they might obtain eternal rewards.

Nor was the labour useless which he bestowed in winning souls, for abundant fruit grew therefrom. For many young men and young women, confiding in his salutary counsel, left their parents and friends, and began to walk humbly and piously; and, abhorring a worldly life, to lead a social life in Christ after the Apostolic manner, and with cheerful hearts delighted to have a common table, and to eat sparingly. Finally he exhorted each one to advance onward in the steps of virtue, to pray oftener, to work at appointed times with their own hands, and to insist alike on sacred reading as on compunctious meditations; by the which a greater ardour of devotion would be acquired, and a continual dread against the incitements of vice maintained, lest any one through slothfulness of heart should be led away captive by the Devil.¹

In this spiritual labour for souls, however, Florentius met with much opposition; and no little calumny and ill-will were raised up against him and his work. Thomas à Kempis thus speaks of it:—

Perceiving these endeavours after spiritual exercises, the old enemy of the human race was sorely fretted, and envying the happy beginning and pious actions of the devout Florentius, he omitted not to persecute him much. For fearing that the spoils of many souls would be taken from him by his example and the industry of his preaching, he urged on certain adversaries who, with coarse words and unusual derisions, attacked the simplicity of the just man, in order to pull him back from his good under-

¹ *Thom. a Kemp. Vita Florentii*, chap. viii. sec. 1, 2.

takings. But being a man of gentle soul and stoutly animated to endure opprobrium for Christ, he was neither affected by the violence of words nor the forgeries of detractions, so regarding all these as mere spiders' webs he steadily continued in the good work which he had begun.

Florentius was at first made Canon of St Peter's in Utrecht, but he resigned it shortly after he became acquainted with Gerard, and removed to Deventer that he might be near him, to be instructed by his example and doctrine, and afterwards became a vicar of St Lebuin. He had no relish for ecclesiastical dignities, for on one occasion previous to his coming to Deventer he had said to one of his friends, 'I hope that I shall not die a canon, but serve God in a humbler state.'

On account of his great bodily weakness, and the frequent infirmities, which in his first fervour had arisen in consequence of his excessive abstinence, he was unable to attend the choir every day. Yet at the greater festivals and solemnities of the Saints he gladly attended vespers and the greater mass, as often as his health permitted. When he was Senior Vicar he always took his place on the left side of the choir in a lower stall, although the highest seat next to the canons was the proper place for him. Standing in the choir, he in no wise used to look around him with wandering eyes, but turned to the altar with all discipline; he stood with the most quiet reverence, devoutly intent upon God and himself, and as far as a sick man could, he used to sing the Psalms with a modulated voice and with unfaltering notes. So courteous was he, and of so reverend a countenance, that many of the youths and singers frequently looked at him, and wondered at his devoutness, since nothing of levity appeared either in his words, or in the motion of his body. I, at that time, continues Thomas, was accustomed with other scholars to attend the choir, as had been enjoined upon me by Master John Boheme, who ruled his scholars and the choir with much strictness. As often as I saw my master, Florentius, standing in the choir—though he

himself did not look round, yet fearing his presence on account of the reverence of his posture—I guarded myself from speaking anything lightly.

It is instructive to observe how à Kempis speaks of *the humble service which Florentius exercised towards the Brethren.*

Christ, he says, the Light of the world, came into the world to enlighten the minds of the Faithful, preaching the words of heavenly life; and by the example of His humility, which He left to be followed by all the Faithful throughout the world, He chiefly inflamed the torpid hearts of sinners to the love of His Name. For Christ so exhibited Himself in the midst of His disciples as one of themselves, manifesting a ministry of love, and not exercising a sovereignty of power; so that whosoever should imitate Him, would also be accounted worthy to be honoured by Him, and to be appointed over all good things in the kingdom of heaven. ‘I am,’ said He, ‘in the midst of you as one who ministers.’ And again, ‘The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life for many.’ And this doctrine of holy service, the humble servant of Christ, Florentius, with his Brethren, studied to observe, persuading all his adherents, of whatever age they were, to serve one another for love, to bear one another’s burdens, not to abhor any menial work, but cheerfully to engage in humble services, embracing that rather which contained less of honour and more of trouble and hardship.

Thus this holy custom and approved virtue increased among them; and like any one of the Brothers, Florentius devoted himself during his week to service in the kitchen, and would there help with all humility, or promptly and cheerfully fulfil whatever things were enjoined him by the cook. For all were ardent to discharge the more servile operations; and to labour for the Kingdom of God was thought a delightful rest. The good Father and sweet master, Florentius, wishing to afford a good example to his inferiors, held himself ever ready to take his turn in the kitchen? To whom a certain neighbour of his said:

'Why, good master, do you occupy yourself in the kitchen? Have you no one who can do that for you? Would it not be better that you should go to church, and that another should cook for you?' To which Florentius replied: 'Ought I not rather to aim at having the prayers of all the others, than only my own? For whilst I am in the kitchen all the others are engaged in praying for me. I hope, therefore, to derive greater benefit from the prayers of others who are in the church, than if I prayed alone.' Thus by his words, and by his example as well, he edified all: not seeking what would be most pleasant to himself, but what was useful and exemplary to others. Whenever he used to eat with the Brethren, he, with his own hands, placed the first dish before them; and grieved very much at this that because of his infirmity he was not able to be daily present at the meals of the Brethren. And for the above reason he used to eat alone with his cook in the kitchen, having a little table soberly prepared, because the weakness of his stomach did not permit him to take solid food. I, though unworthy, adds à Kempis, being invited by him, have often prepared his table, and have brought the modicum which he asked for from the pantry, and rejoicing, I have ministered unto him with much cheerfulness.

Sometimes when it was necessary, and leisure time afforded, he would, with a companion he had selected, carefully read and correct the books already written, or would compile from the Holy Scriptures some notable devotions for the consolation of the Brethren, and for their exercises in private. For he was greatly pleased and delighted when he had done something useful during the day for the common good, knowing that this would be most pleasing to God. But besides the multitude of clerics flocking to him, when the fame of his goodness more widely resounded, he was sought after by many strangers, and by religious and learned men. Therefore, for the health of souls it behoved him to apply himself to higher matters, and frequently to abstain from personal business and private studies, and to prefer spiritual gains to temporal advantages.

So many sometimes, writes Thomas, stood before his chamber door for the sake of consulting him—desiring to speak to him, or

to confess their secrets to him as to a holy man—that scarcely a passage was left to him for going out, scarcely time for saying the ‘Hours,’ and fitly attending to the requisite necessities of the body. Yet he left no one disconsolate, but either extricated the incontinent man, or granted to the petitioner another opportunity of free access to himself, according to his wish. It often happened when he began to read his ‘Hours,’ so many interrupted him one after another, that he was unable to finish the Psalm which he had begun. Lest through weariness he should cease to open the door to one who knocked he would say to himself: ‘Still once more, for the sake of God.’ And this he often repeated and long continued, overcoming from brotherly love the disturbance and want of quietude by patience.

Imbued with the spirit of his heavenly Master, Who went about doing good, Florentius was indefatigable in good works, and *his attention to the poor and afflicted* is especially to be noticed. Thomas à Kempis thus further speaks of his abounding charity.

Among other works of piety, the virtue of compassion conspicuously flourished and increased in the heart of the pious Father, which was manifested and fulfilled in the frequent bestowal of alms to the poor and to strangers. Whence it may be deservedly said of him: ‘He hath dispersed abroad, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness remaineth for ever.’ For Florentius was the most loving father to the poor, the very sweet consoler of the afflicted, and the most compassionate visitor of the sick. Full of the Spirit of God he possessed, together with the milk of pity, the wine of zeal and fervour, nourishing the infirm with the oil of compassion; and though holding their passions and vices in great abhorrence, he exercised both great judgment and discretion in his time.

Often did he send food from his own table to the needy and feeble; and any kind of sustenance sent in love to himself, he imparted with alacrity to others more in need. He also kept the names of the poor in writing, the care of whom he enjoined upon one or two of the Brethren, that they might procure for them be-

coming hospitality, or help towards bearing their expenses. There were at that time certain honourable God-fearing men, living in Deventer, who exhibited a good conversation according to the counsels of Florentius; also certain rich and devout matrons, given to deeds of compassion, who, diligently frequenting the Church of God and honouring His priests, freely bestowed at the request and urgency of Master Florentius much beneficence upon the poor clerics who served God. So pious and so beloved by all was this humble vicar of Christ, that if he asked anything for any poor man, he quickly obtained his request. He made himself as affable to the friendless and to strangers, as if they were friends and kinsmen of his own, asking whence they came, what were their names, and begging that they would sometimes come and visit him.

And I, continues à Kempis, by his authority, have brought to his house at the hour of dinner certain poor men mentioned to me by name. And these being refreshed with food and drink returned to their places with cheerful hearts, praising God for the kindness received, and giving great thanks to their liberal host, Florentius, and his Brethren. Then was plainly fulfilled what is said by the Psalmist, and is sung by many religious persons before the benediction of the table: 'The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and they that seek the Lord shall praise Him.'¹

Also in the month of May, when the wild herbs are especially valuable for medicaments, the pious Father was not forgetful of his poor. Knowing that many were feeble, afflicted with scurvy, and ulcerous, he caused them to come to his house on an appointed day at a certain hour for medicines and for a bath to be taken in warm water with fragrant herbs. And for whom he prepared, when well bathed and washed, a little bed very clean, for thoroughly clearing away their perspiration. A little cup of something being given to invigorate them, and a word of consolation, they went back with great joy to their hospices, mutually conferring among themselves, and saying, 'How good is that man Florentius, and how good are those Brethren dwelling with him, who freely give us such things for God's sake!'

¹ Ps. xxii. 26.

On a certain occasion during Lent (Quadragesima), at a time when things were somewhat dear, and the poor mendicants were oppressed with want, many fled for solace to the compassionate Father Florentius, hoping to find some help, since no one was accustomed to depart from him empty, no one unconsolated. In such a crisis as this, therefore, this father of compassion, distressed by their hunger, grieved much; and having taken counsel with his Brethren, he sought out the best means for relieving the devout poor, who were so straitened in their circumstances that they had neither money in their purses nor bread in their satchels. Then the Brethren were unanimously incited to succour the crowds of poor, especially in so sacred a season as 'Quadragesima,' when the days of penitence are observed, and larger tributes of pity ought to flow to the poor, demanding bread with many prayers for God's sake, as it is read in Isaiah: 'Break thy bread to the hungry, and take the poor and the wanderers to thy house. When thou shalt see him naked that thou cover him, and shalt not despise thine own flesh.'¹ They therefore firmly resolved to deprive themselves of something, and to contribute more plentifully to the poor; moreover, they determined to add one hour beyond the accustomed time of their labour, daily, throughout the whole of 'Quadragesima,' for the poor; and whatever they might gain in that hour by writing, to deliver this, when collected together, to an overseer of the poor, that he might afterwards buy the necessary food and administer it faithfully to the needy. The same was done in other houses, where certain Brothers, writers, and officials, sacrificed the emoluments of their labours in alms to God, willingly depriving themselves, and happily recruiting the poor.

And who shall worthily set forth all the compassion of this most propitious father to the poor and to strangers, but chiefly towards the simple and devout servants of Christ?

Though all be silent, writes à Kempis, yet will I not hold my tongue, but will for ever sing of the benevolence of Florentius, because with indisputable fidelity, I have myself, whilst living with him, proved by experience for a period of seven years the greatness of his goodness. Truly with the blessed Job he was 'a foot

¹ Is. lviii. 7.

to the lame, an eye to the blind, a hand to the needy, a staff to the weak, a solace to the fallen, a garment to the ill-clad.’¹ One poor person rejoiced for the alms given him, another for the coat prepared for him; one carried away a cloak, another a hooded-cape, another received shoes, another stockings, another a girdle and socks. Another rejoiced that he had obtained books, another pens, ink, and paper. Each joyful for their particular gifts, confessed that they had obtained from Florentius not only an emolument for the body, but also a remedy for the soul. The frail tongue is not able fully to express his virtues and deeds of charity because his behaviour and that of his Brethren surpass human judgment. Truly I fear not to say, concerning them, what is written of Apostolic men: ‘Their good works remain with their posterity, and all the Church of the saints shall tell of their alms.’

Thomas à Kempis having described the good esteem in which Florentius was held by the laity as well as the religious of all degrees, and given several instances of his humility and his charity, now informs us of the severity of his early abstinence and consequent sickness and feebleness of body.

The ardent and devout servant of God, Florentius, at the outset of his career, in order to subdue the lust of the flesh, too rigidly chastised his body with fasts and vigils, not sufficiently heeding the debility of his constitution; but in the ardour of his spirit so attacked the domestic enemy, that by the weight of his rigour he destroyed a citizen hitherto necessary and faithful to him; because he abstained not only from things unlawful and superfluous, but deprived himself of many actual necessities, so that for the most part he had lost the desire of eating, and had no taste for discerning food. Whence it once happened that in the absence of the cook he entered the cellar, and drank oil from a certain vessel instead of beer; nor was he able to tell the difference, until the cook enquired from which vessel he had drunk, and then knew that he had made a mistake. At another time in a certain monas-

¹ Job xxix. 15, 16.

tery a small quantity of wine was offered to him to drink for the sake of his infirmity, and from the reverence which the Brethren had towards him. And when he had tasted a little he said to a by-stander: 'How sharp and bitter you have made your beer.' And the Brothers wondered that he distinguished not wine from another liquor. He ate, therefore, oftener as if without taste, and rather from necessity of nature, than for the appetite of the palate or the sweetness of any food.

I went sometimes to visit him in his room, writes à Kempis, where he used to sit feebly on his little couch, and I have greeted him kindly, grieving much on account of his infirmity. And Brother James of Viana, who then waited on him, would bring him a certain sort of food (*comfortativis*), saying: 'This is a good kind of food; taste a little. Does it not taste very well?' Then he would answer in my hearing: 'A crust of bread would taste better to you than that does to me.' Although he was so completely debilitated, and compassed with so many infirmities of the body, yet did he not cease from the work of God and the loving gain of souls; but when he could bear men to approach him, he gave the admonitions of salvation with renewed earnestness to those seeking for it, and so much the more sweet was it, the more they knew that he was beloved of God, and like precious gold was tried in the fire by various infirmities.

Once did he grow so feeble through total fasting—his stomach being already too much weakened—that it was scarcely expected that he would live until Easter. But the devout Brethren did not cease to cry out in their prayers to the Lord for him: for again with multiplied intercessions they entreated the favour of the Lord, which they had already experienced. For when every human help was failing, they the more resorted to the very powerful solace of God.

When, therefore, the fast had been completed, and the glorious Feast of the Resurrection of the Lord had begun, and the chosen man of God, Florentius, was resting quietly on his little bed, overcome with sweet sleep, behold in that most sacred paschal night he was deservedly consoled and comforted by an angelic vision. For he saw two angels appear to him, of whom one stood at the

right hand of the bed, and the other at the left. The one elevated his hand on high, waving it over the head of the sleeper, as if he were going to strike with a sword; but the other immediately withheld the blow of the striker, and prevented him, saying, 'Do not strike, for he shall yet live, and shall not die.' Being astonished at this vision from Heaven, and as if resuscitated from death to life, he awoke wonderfully comforted in the Lord, and calling to his servant, who was sleeping not far off in the room, he said to him confidently, 'Arise and prepare something that I may eat to-day. I feel that I am better, and we must feast together in the Lord.' Then full of great joy, the attendant hastened to prepare what was commanded. And all who heard wondered and rejoiced, that he who just before they feared would die, had begun so quickly to be convalescent. This vision he afterwards made known to his uncle, the Canon of St Mary's in Utrecht, who most cordially loved him; not, however, mentioning that the vision had occurred to himself; but that it was revealed respecting him to some one who was still living. On hearing which his uncle greatly and heartily congratulated him, and blessed God, because He had sent His angel and restored him to health, from the jaws of death. The most celebrated Florentius lived many years after this, to the comfort of all the devout—clerics as well as laics—who came to him from various places and countries for the remedies of their souls; and to whom the man of the Lord was pre-eminent, both by word and example, in the great leadership of a holy conversation among all the Brethren assembled in the House, to the praise of the omnipotent God.

Drawing to the close of the biographical sketch which Thomas à Kempis gives us of Florentius, we have, in the chapter previous to that in which he records his last moments, particular mention made of the number of persons influenced by him to lead holy lives; some occupying posts of importance, others sent out by him as missionaries to various places, with some intimation of the fruitfulness of their labours. It serves

also to give a general view, as witnessed by our author, of the religious movement that was set on foot and carried on by the Brothers of Common Life, with Florentius at their head; and it shows how much good, by the grace of God, may be done by one man with a single aim, a self-sacrificing devotion to the service of his Redeemer; what a train of blessings are set in motion; how many others are awakened to care for souls, and to live for the praise and glory of God.

And now we come to the closing scene of this good man's life:—

When, therefore, the most solemn festival of the Annunciation of our Lord had come, and the day was drawing to its close,—the 'Ave Maria' having just been sung in the usual manner to the praise of the Blessed Virgin, after the hour of Compline,—the most devout Vicar of Christ, Florentius, terminated his life on earth; while the Brethren were praying around him, and sorrowing with great heaviness of heart. And no wonder. For the power of intense love compelled them to weep for so dear a father, when the light and mirror of all the devout, the solace of all the sufferers was taken away from this temporal light. But the pious faith of those who loved him, reflecting on the sobriety and modesty of the life of this most excellent priest, was consoled by the hope of celestial glory that would not be denied to him through Jesus Christ, Whom he loved with all his heart, to Whom he perseveringly clung unto death, by serving Him in the full devotion of faith.

Florentius passed away from this world in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord 1400, in the time of Pope Boniface IX., and in the year of his age, as I think, says à Kempis, fifty, or not much older. He lived, therefore, after the venerable Master Gerard, in a good and holy conversation, some sixteen years, in which period he produced great fruit among the people of God in Deventer, and throughout the whole Diocese of Utrecht. For whose praiseworthy life praise and glory be to Christ for ever,

Who adorned our times with a star of so bright a lustre. On the day following, the Canons and Clerics being assembled, his frail body, chastened with long discipline, was carried in procession to the Church of St Lebuin, by the Canons and Presbyters, and the funeral rites being performed, he was buried before the altar consecrated to St Paul. But he himself, the elect priest of God, like a true humble servant of Christ, had wished to be buried in the cemetery with his Brethren who had died before him, and that no greater honours should be paid to him. But the Reverend Master Rambert, Dean of Deventer, altogether forbade this, and more properly decreed that he should be buried with honour in the church, in a distinguished place, since he had been an illustrious priest of the same church, distinguished for his virtues and knowledge.¹

Thomas à Kempis gives us a short sketch of the lives of two other priests in their community, who were as shining lights in their day and generation, and to whom he himself felt indebted. The first of these is JOHN DE GRONDE, who died the same year that Thomas à Kempis came to Deventer. It is somewhat uncertain whether he ever saw him. His death, however, caused him to be much talked about, and à Kempis could not fail to be deeply interested with the accounts given respecting him, since Gronde was one of the first of Gerard the Great's fellow-labourers. He was a native of Octmersheim, and had laboured as a priest with singular success in Amsterdam, when Gerard invited him to come and help him at Deventer. Writing to the priests who devoutly served the Lord in Amsterdam, who took a keen interest in his work, and with whom he was united in the special bonds of love, Gerard said, 'Be it known unto you that the Church of Deventer

¹ *Thom. a Kemp. Vita Florentii*, cap. xxviii.

lacks a good priest to assist in the confession of the spiritual, because we have no such person allotted to us. I ask you, therefore, if there be no formidable impediment of the holy Church in Amsterdam, that our beloved John de Gronde may be removed hither from your place, and without doubt he will be profitable to us.' And to this appeal they graciously consented.

Coming, therefore, to Deventer, Gronde was kindly received by Gerard, and lived humbly and devoutly the common life in the ancient house of Florentius with the first Brethren of that holy congregation: and being fervent in spirit, it is said, that he was wont very early in the morning to stir up the Brethren to prayer, saying, 'Arise, watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' He was one of the most celebrated of the early preachers of the society, and seems to have been of special service when, through the malice of his enemies, Gerard the Great was not permitted to continue to preach in public. It is especially recorded of him that his voice filled the great church of Deventer, where he frequently preached in a most solemn manner. Father Florentius, among others, is said to have listened attentively to his preaching, being greatly desirous to enjoy the sweetness of the divine discourse from the mouth of the preacher, 'whose voice was sonorous, penetrating the ears of men, and bringing compunction to the heart.'

From time to time he went to Zwolle to comfort the Brothers and Sisters dwelling there, and, continues à Kempis:—

On one occasion he preached many times during Lent; and once on Good Friday, for more than six hours consecutively, with

only the rest of a few minutes in the midst of his discourse, to restore the attention of his auditors. Out of considerate charity he made a long stay with the Brethren there, hearing the confessions of certain devout persons, giving salutary remedies to the penitents, and persuading all who listened to him to remain steadfast in the holy estate they had embraced. For he found much people in that place wishful to serve God; and happily they went on multiplying till our time. So diligently was the devout preacher sought after, and with such pleasure was he heard, that when receiving hospitality, he would not deny the word of salvation, whilst sitting at dinner, to those that sought for it; but whilst refreshing the body, he administered the medicine of life to the souls of the contrite, on their having made confession of their faults. In this peculiar method of work he seemed to be imitating Christ, Who, whilst eating at the table, graciously received the penitence of the blessed Mary Magdalene, and reproved, as well as wisely instructed Simon for thinking evil concerning the penitent, and gave a good reason for the works of piety manifested towards Himself.

He also sometimes, we learn, visited the Brethren at Mount St Agnes, to hear their confessions, for they were as yet poor and without a priest.¹ And after having given them good counsel, he would hasten to return home, unwilling to be long separated from the beloved Brethren of Florentius, with whom it was a solace to him to live in unity, and who most cordially loved him in return. He was simple in his dress, temperate in diet, and not given to flatter worldly people for reward, but as a true evangelical preacher he sought to gain souls, and promote the increase of the spiritual life in the houses of the 'devotees.'

¹ The Monastery had not at this time been established there. There was, however, a house of the Brothers of Common Life, of which some mention will be made hereafter.

Thomas à Kempis further tells us that after the death of Gerard the Great, Gronde removed to the Sister-house in Deventer and occupied Gerard's chamber. When therefore he had ministered faithfully to the Lord, and had accomplished the days of his vocation, and the time had come when he might receive the eternal reward of his labours, he began to be grievously afflicted with sickness. And thinking that he could not continue long, he gave instructions that he might be carried back to the house of Florentius, since he desired to end his days in the midst of his Brethren, to whose prayers and kind attentions he confided himself, that they might assist him in his greatest extremity, and faithfully defend him from the assailing adversary. And this was accomplished through God's mercy. For he was greatly comforted by the presence of Master Florentius and his Brethren, and on the entreaty of the beloved Father he ended his last words in the name of the Lord. For when his end was drawing near, he said to Florentius, 'Behold the enemy is seeking to disquiet me, and would confound me at the last.' To whom the reverend Father replied, 'Do not fear, but trust in the Lord and be still.' Then Gronde, as if truly obedient to his word, said, 'In Nomine Domini.' And thus commending himself to the Lord in his death-struggle, he breathed forth his spirit about four o'clock in the morning on May 7, A.D. 1392. He was buried by the side of Gerard the Great, in the same tomb, where they both alike rest in peace. And, asks à Kempis, 'Was not this very appropriate, that in as much as they had loved each other in life, so in death they should not be separated from one another, but should in the same church be enclosed

under the seal of one stone, looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be raised up to life again by Him?'

When Gronde died, he was succeeded by JOHN BRINCKERINCK, a native of Zutphen, and formerly a beloved disciple of Gerard: and of him I must now make some mention. He is sometimes called John of Zutphen, being a native of the same town with Gerard Zerbolt. This priest was a preacher of the Gospel in the great Church at Deventer, to whom Thomas à Kempis chiefly listened during his stay there; and respecting whom he is pleased to furnish us with several interesting particulars.

When Gerard the Great came and preached in various places, Brinckerinck often associated himself with him as travelling companion, as Luke did with Paul. In this way he often heard and learnt many good things from him, having become a devout imitator of his works, and a worthy witness of his sanctity, going in and out with him, reading the 'Hours,' and diligently performing other pious offices. After the death of Gerard, he lived devoutly and humbly under the rule of the Reverend Father Florentius, and zealously followed the good instructions which he had eagerly imbibed from the preaching of Gerard. By the counsel of God he was promoted to the priesthood, and remained with the Brethren in the Congregation, actively labouring in the establishment of the first house of Florentius, until on the death of John de Gronde he was appointed to the government of the Sisters. Like an earnest man and zealous for purity, he ruled with all good discipline the House entrusted to him, not sparing his own labour, but often exerting himself beyond his strength in his desire to win souls. Sometimes he preached the Word of God in Church, sharply rebuking vice, and recommending virtue in an excellent manner as was fitting.

On several occasions à Kempis seems to have been

deeply touched by the preaching of Brinckerinck, for the impression of what he said seems to have remained with him all his life long, and in after years he makes particular mention of some sermons that he especially remembered. Thus for instance he says:—

Twice I heard him preach on the passion of the Lord very affectingly and at considerable length. His first theme was, ‘God spared not His own Son.’ And the second was taken from the Psalm, ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He hath done unto me.’ . . . And on another occasion, he was once preaching on the Circumcision of the Lord, and treating most pleasantly and sweetly of the name of Jesus, exalting this blessed and delicious name above all things in heaven and earth. At length he descended in his sermon to rebuke the irreverence and familiarity with which certain worldly and foolish men treated the name of Jesus. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘there are some who say with a contemptuous sneer, “Aha! Jesus is the God of the Béguines!” O miserable and foolish men, what is it you say? Who then is your God? Truly your God is the devil, because you say, Jesus is the God of the Béguines. This is a great scandal to you. But to them, this holy name is a great honour and a singular joy; for they constantly repeat the name of Jesus, they pay Him the highest worship, and before all things, and above all the names of the Saints, they love and adore Jesus the Son of God, whom ye deride and despise. Truly it is the Brothers and the Béguine Sisters that delight in the name of Jesus, and do devoutly praise Him, and salute each other in the name of Jesus. Woe unto you who have the devil in your mouths oftener than Jesus, because Jesus seems to you to be too lowly and despised.’ Saying these things, adds à Kempis, he gladdened the lovers of Jesus, and confounded those who derided Him, as they justly deserved to be.¹

Thus by the devout he was heard with pleasure; and though certain individuals interrupted him at times

¹ *Thom. a Kemp. Vita Joannis Brinckerinck, sec. 3.*

with murmurs and dissent, because he condemned their faults when needful, he was not daunted by their reproaches, for he loved to speak the truth, and to contend earnestly for righteousness, choosing rather to serve God and profit the good, than consent to the wicked.¹

Under his rule and protection the number of the Béguines increased greatly; so that he had to make other provision for those who joined their society. Thomas à Kempis thus speaks of this work:—

When the number of the handmaids of God began to increase, John, placing his hope in the help of the Most High, made larger buildings for them to live in, that he might save many souls who had fled to Christ from the shipwreck of this world. At length with great labour he erected outside the city, towards the North, a large monastery for holy women (monasterium sanctimonialium), into which he received several sisters from the house of Gerard, and caused them to be instructed in sacred literature, and to be invested with the habit of the Regulars. These he diligently directed, with those also who remained in the city, for twenty-six years till the end of his life, though some of them were sent to new houses which were being established in other places. For at the first he found only sixteen sisters living in common, but God so multiplied their number in his days, that at his death he left a hundred and fifty.²

But like many of God's great saints, he walked in fear and trembling for his own salvation; lest, as St Paul speaks of himself, having preached to others he himself should be a castaway.

After mentioning the many labours performed by this servant of God in his life-time, and the reproaches and detractions he suffered from the envious, and his

¹ *Ibid.* sec. 2.

² *Ibid.* sec. 4.

overcoming them all by patience, and alluding to the amount of good he had accomplished in all the works he had begun, and the lowly opinion he had of himself, whereby he lived to the glory of God and attracted many to a holy life, à Kempis thus speaks of him as he draws to the close of his earthly career :—

And so, after he had laboured long and with much fruit in the vineyard of the Lord, which the right hand of God had planted, the day passed on to the evening when he should receive the reward of his labour, and cease from all earthly work, according to the word of the Lord, who said : ‘Call the labourers and give them their hire.’ For behold he was seized with a violent fever ; and thinking that he was about to depart, he sent word to the Prior of Windesheim that he was very ill, and that the end of his days was at hand. When the Prior came he explained to him the anxious desire that he had, and committed to him, as to a faithful steward, the care of the holy women, charging him to provide for them a good ruler : so that the zealous discipline lately introduced might not decay by reason of neglect or pride. When, therefore, the Feast of the Annunciation had illuminated the earth, on the following day, the seventh before the kalends of April, John, the faithful servant of Christ, earnestly looking for the heavenly country, rendered up his soul to God, Whom from his youth he had endeavoured to serve with his whole strength. The year was 1419, when the see of Utrecht was filled by the venerable Bishop Frederick de Blanckenheim, the pious and renowned patron of all devout persons. He was buried in the Convent of the Regulars at Dyepenuene, in the middle of the Choir, before the high altar, which he had himself placed there, and dedicated to the honour of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Agnes.

Thus he lived nineteen years after Thomas left Deventer, and did much to keep alive the spirit of vital Christianity.

Surely the lives of such men as these were as lights shining in dark places and in a corrupt age, reflecting in

very truth the Light of Life, to guide many souls into the way of salvation; and their light is reviving to us who behold it at some distance of time; for it must rejoice the heart of every good man, of every true lover of Christ, that there were even in those degenerate days which preceded the Reformation more than a hundred years, such faithful men who bore witness to the Truth.

CHAPTER VI.

Memoirs by à Kempis, of Arnold of Schoonhoven—of John Kettel—of Gerard of Zutphen—and of Lubert Berner.

THERE were two valuable friendships which Thomas à Kempis formed whilst dwelling with 'the Brothers of Common Life' at Deventer. One was with a young man much of his own age, and engaged in the clerical profession—not necessarily entering Holy Orders, but devoting himself to the sacred work of writing out the Holy Scriptures and other devout books. The other friend was one of the lay-members of the Community, and several years older than Thomas. Both of them, as he shows us, were very lowly in their own eyes, but of rare excellency in all that pertained to the true following of Christ.

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The chief companion of Thomas à Kempis at Deventer, and the earliest of his most intimate friends, was *Arnold of Schoonhoven*, a youth of fervent piety, who from childhood was singularly devoted to God. He was, as à Kempis tells us, the son of an upright and honourable citizen of that town, named *Wyrone*, and had by his father's leave come to Deventer to place himself under the guidance and instruction of Father Florentius, by the fame of whose piety he had been attracted. His real love for devotion and desire for God's holy presence and favour, displayed itself even

before he came under the special direction of Florentius; for whilst yet in the house of his parents, he was accustomed before he went to school to enter the Church early in the morning, and there, at one of the altars, he would offer up his prayers and thanksgivings to Almighty God, and for a little space pour forth his heart. This devout behaviour in his childhood gave certain indications of a fuller measure of grace to be attained in riper years; for placing himself day by day under the special protection of the Almighty, he remained free from the contagion of carnal lust.

On coming to Deventer he earnestly besought Father Florentius to receive him, and to be permitted to board and lodge in the house of the devout Clerics, that he might share their lot, and be under the care and discipline of the pious Fathers. Now the gaining a place in the house of the fraternity was a most joyful thing to Arnold, for which he returned very hearty thanks to God. And, as if he had been converted anew and called to a more perfect state of life, he studied to behave himself very zealously and humbly, that he might be an example to every one of virtue and self-subjection. He relaxed nothing of his former devotion; and was most attentive to keep the good customs delivered to him by the older Brethren. He submitted to discipline with all his heart, exercising himself daily in renewed endeavours after holiness of life, according to that admonition of the Apostle, 'Be renewed in the Spirit of your minds.' (Eph. iv. 23.) He shook off all drowsiness of spirit, betaking himself with alacrity to watching and praying, still exercising great

pains in writing, and by his loving and pious persuasions, inclining the negligent to desire what was good.

By a singular coincidence Thomas was admitted to this Brother-house about the same period, for he says:— ‘At the same time, by means of Florentius and with his permission, I also came to dwell in that very House, and I remained in that Society for nearly twelve months, both of us being contented to occupy together one little chamber and one bed.’

The example of his young friend Arnold's glowing piety evidently made a deep impression upon him; for he continues: ‘Many signs of devotion did I notice in Arnold because he was much more exemplary and devout at home and in private, than could be noticed in the school, though he was kind and courteous to all, and not given to annoying or injuring any. Every morning at 4 o'clock the bell was rung for a quarter of an hour, when Arnold would immediately rise with alacrity, and upon his bended knees would utter a short prayer, pouring forth his soul to God, and then, quickly dressing himself, would hasten to the House of Prayer.’ He was in no hurry, however, in his morning devotions, but went leisurely and seriously through them, being in no wise a hindrance to others, since he took special care to be wholly occupied with the sacred duty in which he was employed. He made ready to be with the first that went to the Holy Sacrament, and bending lowly before the altar, he listened to the Eucharistic Office with reverential and uplifted soul. Nor did he cease praying and meditating until the solemnities of the holy Ordinance were entirely finished.

Besides, he loved some secret place, where he was not

likely to be disturbed, and where he could devote himself to prayer and meditation unobserved. And so much the more fervently did he pray, observed his friend à Kempis, in proportion as he knew that he was doing it in secret. He shunned the presence of men at such moments lest he should in some measure be noticed for his devotion, taking care not to raise his voice too high lest he should be heard, because it was his desire to lay open his heart to God only in secret prayer.

A Kempis was especially privileged by occasionally witnessing these outpourings of his friend's soul, unknown to him at times; and yet at other times it was as if Arnold were not unwilling that à Kempis should be near the sacred Shekinah, when its glory and grace were unfolded to him, since the Providence of God had drawn them so close together, and they were so like-minded in their desire to attain more grace to walk in newness of life before God. For speaking about his friend Arnold at such moments he says:—

Yet he was not always able to hide himself so entirely but that, unwittingly letting his light shine, he was heard in church. It often happened, therefore, that I was joyfully encouraged in my devotions through his fervour, so that I carefully took heed to what I was doing whilst at God's footstool; for I was animated to more earnest prayer by beholding such grace in devotion as he seemed commonly to possess every day. Nor need we wonder, he continues, that he, who was so devout in prayer, continually kept a watchful guard over his heart and lips wherever he went. So great too was the sweetness of his devotions that the sound of gladness could be heard in his throat as if he were tasting some delicious liquor, just according to what is said by the Psalmist, 'My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips.'¹

¹ Ps. lxiii. 5.

Here was the very companion every way suited for Thomas à Kempis in his early life to promote his growth in grace and holiness, and one in whose congenial society he could always find refreshment and delight. The one became very dear to the other, for they found in each other that harmony of soul and sympathy of disposition that earnest minds most crave after and desire. Truly the value and blessing of godly companionship cannot be over-estimated! It is one of God's best gifts to the children of men! and next to that of having godly parents it is productive of the greatest good; nay, sometimes when the influence of parents is unheeded, it sweetly and gradually draws the soul away from evil, to desire a better life, in the striving to please God. How hallowed is the sacred tie which thus binds one soul to another! What a safeguard! how healthful, cheering, and strengthening! It gives a delight and sweet fervour to religion, which greatly helps and encourages the youthful disciples of our Lord to persevere: the difficulties and hindrances which meet them in the narrow way are more easily overcome, temptations lose half their force, sorrow much of its bitterness, and even death its terror, as the one can with the other look up to Jesus as the Captain of their Salvation, under whose banner they have fought side by side; whilst they both can look forward to a happy reunion in the home of the saints, when they have severally finished their course on earth.

It was his endeavour, says à Kempis, to maintain such grace in devotion, and so to persevere in diligent prayer, that it never might be said of him that he had received the grace of God in vain. Therefore before he read any book, or began to write, he would

briefly pray, lifting up his soul to God. And he did the like when he had ended his work, giving thanks. Before leaving the house also, or on returning home, he would bend low before the presence of Christ, praying and entreating a blessing upon his work.

At every hour when the bell sounded, he engaged in a short religious exercise: and this he did, as often as he frequented the schools. And frequently, on his way, if he saw the door of the church open, he gladly entered the building, either before or after being at the school, or else he bent himself lowly towards the church. He never knowingly omitted any duty, however little it might be. He gratefully received admonitions concerning any small matter that was named to him, studiously taking care to amend. Every word spoken by his Superior, or his Vicar, he humbly received, and with such reverence as if he had heard it from the mouth of God or some one of the saints; neither did he dare to disobey, or so much as question what was said to him. Therefore, adds Thomas, he had inwardly great peace, and was as dear to God as he was to men, and was as one that always rejoiced in the Lord, whilst ready to obey every command.

Before the Festivals of Christ or of the Saints, he studied to prepare himself with great intention for the Holy Communion, and was accustomed to say, 'Now the great festival is at hand, let us prepare ourselves devoutly to receive the Lord.' Also, 'To-day is the festival of such a saint, let us fervently implore his suffrages.'

He did not yield to external matters, but leisurely read the appointed lessons in the sacred pages, often silently praying, or very earnestly breathing forth his soul, though it was chiefly in his little room that he sought God's presence. If he found anything he considered worthy of notice he showed it to his intimate companion, or handed it forth to be read by others, so that he might draw them from light and vain discourse to things sacred and good.

On the festival days he brought not a few that came to the city, of whatever age or condition they were, to the house of Florentius, to hear him discourse, rejoicing, and hoping for the conversion of some of them. And being inspired by God, he was not disappointed of his desire, since he saw the fruit of his labours every day in the improved conduct of both the young and old. His own con-

verse with them, and his exhortations, were not respecting lofty and speculative matters or on secular things, but concerning true conversion to God, and the amendment of life in the world. And he was more serviceable in this honest simplicity of devout conversation than in the subtlety of Latin discourse.

Afterwards, therefore, when he seemed sufficiently advanced in learning, he relinquished scholastic studies, and confined his attention almost entirely to those that were spiritual; and forgetting home, and parents, and his own country for the sake of things Eternal, he readily submitted himself to the yoke of obedience, to the discipline of the Clerics, according to the laudable customs of the ancient house originally appointed by the most devout Father Florentius.

Arnold had a pleasant manner with the Brethren without frivolity; yet he was not given to much speaking, since he placed a watch over his mouth; and whenever subjects for edification were introduced among them, he was much more willing to listen than to give instruction. He was faithful and fervent in his work, and was grieved if he could not assist the Brethren in some manner when they had to rise at night. Before the hour for writing, he was accustomed to prepare his pens, so that he might thereby write more expeditiously, and be more at liberty to further the common welfare. Thus he endeavoured constantly to pursue his ordinary work so that the Brethren should not be impeded through him, but that he might the rather be somewhat useful to them. And to this end also he cheerfully engaged in common and exterior works.

His great pleasure, however, seemed to be in carrying out explicitly the will of the Rector, highly esteeming his every word and action, and fulfilling his orders as if they had been given from heaven. And thus, continues Thomas, not only in his youth, but to the end of his life he remained as innocent, obedient, and submissive, as a child. In his dress also, as well as in his discourse and manners, he exhibited humility and modesty, always trying to gain over to better ways those in whom he noticed any rudeness of behaviour, or had perceived any defects. He was wont also to seek the lowest place for himself, not feignedly, but willingly.

After the death of his parents he was desirous of giving the inheritance that had come to him, for the common use of the

Brethren, but death, coming before this was done, hindered him. For when he purposed to go into Holland to make a disposition of his property, he came as far as Zutphen, to the Brothers of Common Life, who were living there, and having tarried a few days with them, he began after the Feast of St James and St Philip, to be so ill that he was obliged to postpone his journey further into the country. And although feeling himself becoming more and more infirm, he did not altogether take to his bed, for it was not until the day sacred to the memory of the Bishop of Wyrone, which was the last day but one of his life, that he laid himself down for the last time on his bed ; and on the morrow, that is the day sacred to the martyr Gengulp, about the hour of Vespers, having settled his affairs, he received the Sacrament of Christ's sacred Body, and was anointed.

But late in the evening, finding himself much debilitated by what he had done, he desired the Brethren to come together to him, to whom he devoutly commended himself that they should faithfully pray for him, and that they would communicate his death to a certain devout Virgin in Schiedam, of the name of Lydewy, whom he had once upon a time visited in that part of Holland; concerning whose patience many wonderful things are reported, and who had promised that she would pray for him. Having said these things he lay in the full possession of his senses until the tenth hour. When he came to this his last hour he did not manifest any distress, but said that he was ready for his departure; and then, whilst the Brethren were present and praying for him, he yielded up his spirit at the hour just named, without any great pain, as it seemed. He had lived with the devout Brethren from his youth, for thirty-one years, with a good conscience, having persevered as a true worshipper of God, and as a devoted lover of Christ in the humble position of a Cleric in the Congregation of the Brethren. The death of this sweet and amiable Brother was on May 9, in the City of Zutphen, in the year 1430 (just thirty years after Thomas had separated from him on his leaving Deventer.) He was buried in the Cemetery of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the south part of the Church.

The other intimate friend and companion of Thomas

à Kempis in his early years, and who next to Father Florentius exercised the greatest influence for good in Deventer was John Cacabus, or as he was otherwise called, John Kessel, Kettel, or Ketel,¹ who was deputed to the office of cook; and who, though wealthy and of a good family, would never take upon himself any higher office than that to which he had been first appointed. From à Kempis we learn that earlier in life he had entered into business as a merchant in Holland and Flanders, and had been very successful. Nevertheless his prosperity did not bring with it contentment; he was restless, and thought he should be happier, and have things more according to his desire if he changed to some other mode of life and took up another career. He was therefore minded to leave his business, in the hope, at first, of making a better merchandise in the Church, thinking—as others have done—to make worldly gain by a profession of godliness, and that he might, through interest—since he had friends who could aid him—or by making presents, come without much difficulty to be made a Bishop in some cathedral, or a royal Abbot, and wear rich robes. For so much was his mind taken up with this design that, in order to be prepared

¹ In the *Life of John Kettlewell, the Non-juror*, written by Dr George Hickes and Robert Nelson, Esq., allusion is made to this pious person in these words, 'There was one John Ketel, alias Kettel (which is no other than John Kettlewell without the termination), in the fifteenth century, a person of most exemplary piety and devotion, whose life was written by that holy man, Thomas à Campis (Kempis), so that the Kessels (derived from the Latin *castellum*, a castle), and the Ketels of Holland and Flanders, and the Kettlewells of England, are indeed *all originally* but one name and one family, only the termination, which is added to this last, as in many other English names is done, must have been of a *Norman* original, by the corruption of *Ville*, a town or village, into *well*. And the first of his family very probably were so called, from being of such a town or village.'

beforehand, he had whilst a layman, provided himself with most costly priestly ornaments and robes, all embroidered with inwrought gold, such as any lord Abbot might wear. He had frequently considered with himself as to what would be the best way to carry his project into execution, and had already taken some steps towards the attainment of it.

But, while he thought on these things, the Spirit of God wrought powerfully on his conscience, and convinced him of the sinfulness of such a course, and of his own sinfulness in general. At length, being inspired with the desire after better things, he resolved to cast aside the deceitful and burdensome servitude of the world, and seek the office of the priesthood in a proper spirit, hoping that he might serve God more honestly in that state of life. With this purpose before him he gave up for awhile his pursuit of business, and hearing of the fame of Father Florentius and the devout clerics at Deventer, he went thither at the suggestion of a good man with whom he had had some intercourse, and attended the public school, with certain other persons who were desirous of gaining more learning. During the time, however, whilst endeavouring to obtain some knowledge of Grammar and of the Latin language for the reading and understanding the Holy Scriptures, he had frequent opportunities of observing the holy life and conversation of the pious 'Brothers of Common Life,' and was so affected by what he saw and heard of them, that he was wholly changed into another man. He was now so incited with the great desire to abandon worldly business altogether, that he entirely gave up his interest to others engaged in it, and entered, as à Kempis has

it, 'the school of Heavenly exercises,' that he might learn the will of God in the house of Florentius, where many lived together in the service of Christ, being well grounded in humility and established in Divine love.

Previous to his coming to live with the Brethren he sold the precious ornaments which he designed for himself when he should enter the ministry as he had intended, as also the beautiful robes with curious devices in gold—all of which he had prepared beforehand whilst engaged in his worldly affairs—and distributed the proceeds to charitable purposes. He then bought some very plain clothes to wear, including a cap and a tunic or frock, such as are used by cooks, and thus accoutred he presented himself, and petitioned with great urgency that he might serve the Brethren in the kitchen, in order that, so long as he lived among them, he might show forth his grateful submission to God in a humble station. After many solicitations, therefore, he was admitted on probation, and was more delighted with the common garments suitable for the menial work of the kitchen, than the priestly robes wherewith he once thought to deck himself.

And in this lowly condition, continues Thomas, he became a shining light and a most admirable example of humility and obedience to all that were in the House, subjecting himself to perfect mortification of the flesh and spirit for the love of the Crucified. But though he thus humbled himself, the fame of his good conversation got abroad to the ears of strangers; and many people in high position wondered that he, who was once so rich a merchant, should now become a poor cook and a humble Brother. For he who had purposed for himself at first the dignity of the Ecclesiastical Order, afterwards having given up every worldly distinction, and the pride of any dignity that he might obtain,

now sought the lowest place of all, that he might imitate Christ, who did humble Himself by taking upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might minister to his Disciples.

With him the young student—Thomas à Kempis—formed a warm intimacy which quickly grew into a great friendship: he thus speaks of him when he begins to tell the story of his life.

This humble servant of Christ; despising all worldly things, chose the way of holy poverty on earth that he might possess Eternal riches with the saints in Heaven. For through works of mercy and charity, he gained an entrance into perennial felicity. This man, but so lately well known to me when I came to Deventer, exhibited so much humility in his conduct and exemplary behaviour that he preached more 'on the contempt of worldly things' by his deeds than by his words. Yet his discourse was not lacking force when he came to speak about God, inasmuch as he persuaded his auditors that they should renounce all worldly grandeur, and that, for the love of Christ, no labour should be abhorred. But who, he asks, can worthily speak of the virtues of this man? Nevertheless love requires me to say a few words, so that this hidden pearl in the Lord's Vineyard should not any longer lie concealed, but that it should be brought to light for the edification of many.

Many interesting circumstances does Thomas narrate respecting this friend. He mentions how this good Brother was wont to discourse with his companion—probably à Kempis himself—concerning holy poverty and self-abnegation; and spoke out with such fervour in his words, that he appeared in his outward gesture and by the lighting up of his countenance, as if he must needs be all in a flame. He rendered the greatest thanks to God that he had been called to this kind of earthly ministration—viz., that of being a cook to

the Community, and that he had not been suffered to be lost in attending to so many worldly interests. Therefore he was wont to say to the Brethren with great zest and pleasantness of soul, when he had his white dress on for cooking: 'Am I not now made a great priest and prelate, since I can administer the Communion twice every day to the Brethren?' signifying by this parable, as à Kempis has it, that since he prepared and served dinner and supper for them morning and evening, so he did thereby renew Christ in each of the Brethren, meaning that he was the appointed instrument of providing sustenance for those who were living as the followers of Christ. There is also an evident allusion to his past dreams of vain glory, and how it had in a certain way found fulfilment through his self-abasement, since he had become a true servant of Christ in ministering to them.

Oftentimes, too, says à Kempis, has he been found on his bended knees engaged in prayer near the fire; and when carrying some pot or vessel in his hand he has been heard devoutly singing Psalms. Hence he made the kitchen his oratory, knowing that God was everywhere to be found, and while kneeling near the material fire he became inflamed with spiritual fervour. What he was wont to hear sung in Church, he sweetly ruminated upon, or softly chanted over to himself whilst busily engaged at his work. And thus he had God in his heart whilst he outwardly attended to the duties of the kitchen, and was inwardly free to meditate upon heavenly things, so that no moment was spent unfruitfully by him, and no negligence occurred in his private devotions. He diligently studied to do his best, and seasonably to prepare food for the Brethren, yet he avoided introducing superfluities. And moreover, whilst he distributed the better pieces of food to those he served, he usually reserved the worst to be consumed by himself.

Though he continued as a humble lay-brother to the end of his days, and did not aspire even to be a cleric, yet he seems to have seized every opportunity of drawing the minds of those who in any wise came near him to the contemplation of holy truths, and to the love of God his Saviour: and this he did not in any formal or dry manner, as if he was but repeating some worn out formula, but as if it came fresh from his heart, and as if some light had recently dawned upon him.

‘He was also,’ says à Kempis, ‘full of compassion towards the suffering poor, and chiefly to those who desired to serve God.’ And when certain poor persons said to him that they received but little by begging from door to door, he wondered that so many rich people gave so niggardly, and did not give more largely to the poor, since they could without much detriment to themselves exercise so much compassion, and receive from God the greatest reward. Mention is then made of an experiment which he tried.

Willing, however, to prove what the poor said, he departed late one day—having assumed the habiliments of a poor man, to beg bread, with a companion whom he had selected to go with him. And he went and cried outside at the door of the houses, ‘Give something to a poor stranger for God’s sake.’ Hearing this a certain cleric living in one of the houses rose up quickly to open the door, that he might know who the stranger was. And running after him, he enquired, ‘Who are you that you should beg of us in this manner?’ But he, desiring to remain unknown, held his peace whilst petitioning for food, and merely said, ‘I am—’ Then the other, recognising him from his voice, said, ‘Art thou not John Kettel? Art thou now begging bread?’ When he came to this, John said, ‘Be silent, do not betray me by making

a noise about it. It is a good and pious cause.' And the cleric returning to the house related the circumstance to the household, saying, 'How strange, how very strange is that which I have seen, John Kettel, the cook at the Brother-house of Florentius, is going from door to door begging bread.' But they, signing themselves with the sign of the cross, were astonished, saying, 'What a good man he has shown himself to be.' And these people, conferring among themselves, were much edified by the example of John, and privately recounted to their friends what had been done. But John, returning to the house of the Brothers with the fragments of the alms he had received, carried them with great gladness into the kitchen, and showed to Florentius and the Brethren the benediction of holy bread which he had besought and obtained for God's sake. Florentius himself was deeply impressed with the devout lowliness of the cook, and said, 'John, give us part of your alms;' who replied, 'Willingly will I give you some of these things to eat, but then I must provide again for the poor from the food you have, because the poor ought not to lose what belongs to them, but should receive a more ample allowance.' Then there was given to the Brethren for dinner some of those alms which had been obtained, and John received the whole of the bread that was in the storehouse of the Brothers, to give to the poor for God's sake, as he had been commissioned to do; and there was great joy in that house.

Another anecdote that à Kempis tells of his friend is this:—

On one occasion he went to draw water from the river near the fish gate; and entering the vessel of a certain fisherman that he might draw the water clean from the river, the man to whom it belonged came upon him and said, 'What business have you here? Depart at once from the boat.' Then hearing the words, with incredible patience he omitted to draw the water, and prepared to leave, lest he should further offend the man; but the fisherman seeing that he was one of the good Brothers, and that he would depart without saying anything, was moved with compassion, and said, 'Come here to me, and I will fill your bucket;'

and drawing the water returned it to him, saying, 'Now go in peace.' And having given thanks to his benefactor, Kettel departed, bearing away the water in the bucket, devoutly praying by the way, as he was always accustomed to do when he went out to transact any business.

He died in the Brother-house about five years after à Kempis had been at Deventer, that is, when à Kempis was nearly nineteen years of age. During the period of his sickness certain poor clerics came to visit him. And, says à Kempis :—

On beholding them with eyes of compassion, he exclaimed : 'Oh how dear you are unto me, my poor brethren ; for the rest of my time upon earth I shall not be able to give you anything. I commend you, however, to God, that He may provide for you in all good things.' Among many other exercises of humiliation, it was his custom every Sunday to clothe himself in a long white tunic or shroud-like garment, to remind himself of his death ; and in this he performed the duties of his office as cook. It was his earnest request also that he should be buried in it when he died. The which good office was done for him by his associate in the kitchen, Matthias de Macklineus, who afterwards washed the vestment, that he might be buried in it as he had desired.

Master Amilius, who diligently attended to him in his illness, and continually waited upon him, bringing him what he needed, came to visit him very early one morning on a certain day, and asked him if he wished for anything, for by his permission he would go to the Church, that he might hear Mass. This done, he returned to his sick friend, when John said to him, 'It will please me that you share the Mass with me, that thou hast heard.' Amilius answered, 'Willingly would I share and give the whole to thee in love, beloved Brother.' To which John said, 'My Brother, our Lord Jesus Christ has thought worthy to visit me, whilst thou hast been absent.' Then Amilius, hearing this, said, 'When did He depart, I beseech thee?' He replied, 'Immediately when thou hadst opened the door He departed.' Then Amilius rejoiced

greatly, and rendering thanks, he blessed God. 'And these things,' adds à Kempis, 'he afterwards narrated to me.'

The kind Brother above named states that after this, Ketel turned himself more intently to prayer, and among other things to chanting the psalms, musing especially upon the word, 'The Lord looseth them that are bound; the Lord giveth sight to the blind.' And as his friend sat by his bed-side, he endeavoured to catch more of his words, that he might treasure them up as a memorial, but the hoarseness of his voice prevented him from hearing what was said. He suffered greatly for a long while, and was much reduced in strength as death approached; but at last, in the year 1398, on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, having been brought to a blessed end in the service of Christ, he breathed forth the spirit of life, amid the prayers of the Brethren who had assembled round him. His loss was much lamented by all who knew him. He was buried in the cemetery at St Lebuin, where many also of the Brethren who died in the faith of Christ after him rest in peace, to be restored to life through Christ, with all the faithful at the last day. Glory and praise be unto Christ, for such a devout man and humble cook, who, in a brief course of years, and with a little labour, has had allotted to him (as we piously believe) the highest reward in Heaven. Concerning him the venerable Father Master Huesden, Prior of Windesheim, bore this excellent testimony, saying, 'Would to God that He would enable me to become a like man, and to die in a like state as he had done.'

Another individual who in no little degree contributed to advance the spiritual education of à Kempis,

was Gerard Zerbolt, who acquired some renown as one of the Brethren of Deventer. Thomas à Kempis speaks in loving remembrance of him, designating him Gerard de Zutphen, because he was born at this place in the year 1367. He was the *Scripturarius*, who directed the work of the clerics, and the Librarian who took charge of the manuscripts and books of the Brotherhood; and such was his earnest zeal to know the revealed will of God, that it may truly be said of him in the language of Job, that 'he esteemed the words of His mouth more than his necessary food.'

A Kempis thus writes of him:—

It is a pleasing duty for me to trace out in a few words the virtues of so godly and learned a man as Gerard de Zutphen, and to propose for a good memorial of life his example and writings, that they may be copied by future generations. He deserves especially to be named as one of the first of the Brethren (that joined the community), and as one of the most ardent lovers of the Divine law. For though he lived but a short time, he yet bequeathed to us the most acceptable monuments of doctrine, since he was remarkable for his diligence in the study of the Holy Scriptures, drawing forth also from deep and recondite sentences of the Fathers, various species of aromatic learning, against the distempers of vice, and for the guarding of the soul against lassitude, as are to be found chiefly set forth in the books written by him, one of which begins with *Homo quidam*, and the other, *Beatus vir*.

Like à Kempis he had obtained the rudiments of learning elsewhere, and had come to complete his education at the celebrated school of Deventer, where he soon came under the influence of Florentius, and before long wholly attached himself to him and the Brethren. In his youth, whilst still a boy, he had

shown great eagerness for learning, and thirsted for the acquisition of knowledge. He hung upon the lips of his teachers, always imagined the hours of the lessons too short, and deplored nothing so much as when they were discontinued. His intense passion for study was kept vigorously alive through the few years of his after life, and the associating with holy men gave it the direction towards sacred things, which he resolved to pursue with untiring energy.

His eager zeal for learning, combined with his almost complete subjugation and forgetfulness of self, was something remarkable, and at times amounted—to say the least of it—to imprudence, and called for the interference of his superior. Incessantly occupied with reading, studying, and transcribing the Bible and other religious books, he spent the entire day, except the intervals devoted to religious exercises and meals, in his cell, finding his solace in sacred books and pious research, and even in the finest weather would scarcely ever approach the window to breathe the fresh air. Unless, therefore, Father Florentius—who dearly loved him as a faithful Brother in the Lord—had carefully watched over him and been solicitous of his necessities, his health would have been injured more than it was, and his life earlier cut short.

But with all his forgetfulness or neglect of self, and his abstraction from worldly matters, Gerard of Zutphen was far from being inexperienced in temporal affairs; for he possessed great insight about them, and a sound judgment on questions of law; so that Florentius, in settling matters connected with the business of the Brotherhood, would frequently ask his advice, and

engage his services, especially in those things which required a knowledge of the law. Many other persons—those in high position as well as clerics—consulted him in any case of doubt, or when they wanted his opinion on some weighty and difficult business, and listened reverently to him: for in solving any spiritual question, when he delivered his sentiments he usually confirmed them by the authority of the Saints whose teaching or example he wholly followed. On this account he was much extolled by wise and learned men, but he himself still remained humble, and accounted the praise of men for very little, for as à Kempis adds, he did not study to be accounted a professor of elocution, but the maintainer of a good conscience.

He was very helpful to many clerics also, who were strangers, or did not belong to the Brotherhood, lending them sacred books (*sacros codices*) that they might study them in their own homes, and read them in the schools. He admonished them—and particularly those engaged in the study of divinity—not to yield to a life of ease, or to saunter about at feast-times. He had quite an extraordinary fondness for good books, and pointing to portions, or to separate books, of the Holy Scriptures, he would say, ‘These books preach to you and teach you more than we can possibly tell you. For these sacred writings are the light and solace of our minds—the true elixir of life—so that we can no more do without them in our earthly pilgrimage than we can do without the Sacraments of the Church.’ From this we learn, as à Kempis remarks, that he loved the books of sacred theology above the riches of the world, and rejoiced more in a good book than in a rich dinner and the most highly flavoured wines; for he knew that they were not wise who delighted themselves in delicacies to eat and drink; whereas, on the other hand, they who gave themselves up to sacred studies were replenished with wisdom, and worthy of being admitted to heavenly secrets. Therefore, no wonder that he held

books in great respect, read them very attentively, and took care of them as if they were treasures of great value to him.

Moreover, à Kempis tells us, he looked not so much to the lengthened exercise of study for the right understanding of the Scriptures, as to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Who giveth understanding to the lowly, and revealeth His mysteries to the pure in heart. To the pursuit of this purity he directed all his energies—stirring up the fear of God in the newly converted, chiding the sluggish, and exhorting those who desired to excel in virtue, to the mortification of all vice within them. ‘If,’ said he, ‘we neglect to fight against vice, evil passions will prevail, and we shall fall into the snares of the devil, who is always lying in wait for us. Therefore labouring with all diligence we must manfully repulse him, since the crown of eternal life is promised to those who conquer.’ After this then, having been illuminated with wisdom from on high, this worthy Priest conversed humbly and devoutly among the Brethren with much grace, which greatly tended to their advancement in holiness of life.

Many deaths had taken place around him; some from the very house where he dwelt, had been carried off to their last resting place; his own dear friend Lubert Berner was among the number—for loss of whom he mourned deeply.

And, continues Thomas à Kempis, being inflamed with zeal he did not long survive such proficiency, but mindful of the decease of Lubert, whom he loved most dearly, and at whose death he shed so many tears, he followed him in a brief space of time. It happened on this wise—he had been sent with a Brother in the same house, Amilius van Buren, to see the Abbott of Dickeninghe, an accomplished Canonist, with whom he was oftentimes accustomed to discuss cases of law and conscience, and was on his return to Deventer, when coming to the Brother-house at Windesheim, where he designed to stay all night, he became sick unto death. Amilius following the custom of the Brethren, to speak unreservedly to each other, said to him, ‘It seems to me that your sickness will speedily end in death.’ To which Gerard replied,

‘It seems so to me also.’ He rapidly grew worse ; there appeared no hope of checking the disease ; his time had come ; and he breathed his last as if he had fallen into a sweet sleep, on the night of the Festival of St Barbara, A.D. 1398, in the thirty-first year of his age. His body was buried with honour by the Prior and the Brethren, in the passage before the door of the Church. Florentius hearing of his death, was greatly distressed, having accounted him as his beloved friend—and both he and the Brethren (among whom Thomas à Kempis was now reckoned), bewailed him with great lamentation, being constrained thereto by their great love for him, because, adds à Kempis, this dear Brother, that had been taken from them, was as a pillar of the house, and a right hand in matters of business. But blessed be God, Who hath granted to us such a man !

Gerard of Zutphen was one of those who contended most warmly for the translation of the Bible into the German tongue, and at this time he almost stood alone save and except the Brothers with whom he lived, in pleading for the people that they might *read the Word of God in their mother-tongue*. Another matter which he also took up most warmly, akin to this, was that the people should be suffered *to pray in their own tongue*. All the prayers of the Church were at that time also offered up in Latin, so that, though the unlearned might to some extent catch the meaning of what was said, and might endeavour to lift up their hearts to God, in the words uttered, yet could they not be edified as they should be, while praying in an unknown tongue. Now on both these subjects, Gerard of Zutphen has written treatises, which are remarkable, considering the time when they were penned, and are well deserving even at this day of a thoughtful attention. He seemed to perceive intuitively that the withholding of these two blessed privileges from the people was a denying to

them a knowledge of the Gospel, and a barrier to the progress of true religion; and besides, his reading of the Fathers, and his converse with practical men, deeply earnest themselves, had rendered him doubtless very sensible of their importance, so that he was very eloquent, and pleaded hard and convincingly that both the Bible might be read, and the Prayers of the Church might be said, in a language the people understood.

Gerard Zerbolt, moreover, undertook the defence of the manner of life adopted by 'the Brothers of Common Life.' Zerbolt maintained that it was not only lawful, but highly beneficial for Christian people to agree thus to live even without vows, when able to dispense with them.

Some allusion has been already made to LUBERT BERNER. The reader may remember how much Gerard Zerbolt took to heart the death of this brother.

Lubert Berner, otherwise called Lubert ten Bosche, was born at Zwolle of a good family, and having finished his education, and taken his degree at the university of Prague, he returned to settle in his native city, where he was joyfully welcomed by his friends. But not long after this, being drawn by the affability and friendship of the devout Brethren, he was moved by a heavenly inspiration to amendment of life; and, because his parents and acquaintance were much opposed to his adopting a more religious life, he departed from them secretly; and for the purpose of serving Christ, he happily changed his pursuit of worldly things into that which was spiritual.

He came, continues à Kempis, to Deventer, to Florentius, then so renowned for the sanctity of his life, and being paternally

received by him, he was taught to renounce entirely the pomps and vanities of the world, and to follow the humble life of Christ. With the whole fervour of his soul he put himself under the yoke of obedience, and seized with alacrity the discipline of a new life ; offering himself daily to the Lord as a living sacrifice, to the end that he might quickly attain the highest state of perfection, by the subjugation of his own will.

His father being an influential man and sheriff of Zwolle was very indignant that his son, having become a disciple of Florentius, should have changed to so humble a condition. He therefore sent several friendly messengers, that they might induce him to relinquish his holy purpose, imagining that he had erred exceedingly in foolishly giving up his parents and the riches of the world. But Lubert, being intrepid, remained constant in soul, choosing rather to follow the counsel of Christ than to do the will of his earthly father, because God, Who is greater than man, demands our love before all things, saying, ‘He who loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.’

After Lubert had been some while at Deventer, his father fell sick and became exceedingly ill, so that he could not speak. And when news of this came to Lubert, with a message that he should come without delay to his father if he desired to see him alive—so that, as à Kempis has it, he who was in extreme necessity might have the benefit of his counsel in obtaining God’s propitiation for his salvation—he went without delay to his paternal home, wishing to condole with his sick father in filial love, mindful of our Lord’s precept, but unmindful of the injury he had sustained, that he might further the salvation of his soul.

And the Father, upon seeing his beloved son once more, was exceedingly joyful at the sight of him. And wonderful to relate, he who beforehand had been dumb, and deprived of the use of his voice, now began to

speak from very gladness. Presently he entreated forgiveness from Lubert, because he had resisted him in the way of God; and the son, overflowing with bowels of love, freely forgave all. The father being then reconciled to the son, now began to exercise sounder judgment, and unwilling to deprive his son of his patrimony, which he had threatened to do when he would not return, gave instructions that all things should be given to him, which fell to him by hereditary right. These things he settled whilst alive, that he might find God when he died, and be faithfully assisted by the prayers of his son.

After a few days his father died, and Lubert, mindful of his love and kindness to him, shed many tears. And when he received his inheritance, it was not expended in satisfying his own desires, but he handed the whole of it over into the hands of Florentius, to be dispensed in the pious service of the Brothers. Nor did Florentius retain any of that which had been entrusted to him for his own use, but expended the whole in building another House, and defraying its expenses. This is the House notably known by the title of the House of Florentius, which through the favour and consent of the sheriffs of the city was founded for the Congregation of the Devout clerics, in the year 1391.

In the same year Lubert was ordained priest with his friend Henry Brune, a devout man. They were both as it were spiritually twin brothers, having been nourished in the same house with the milk of sacred devotion; and being adorned with many virtues, were deemed worthy to be admitted at the same time to priestly honours; by the world they were deemed

honourable by birth, by God they were leaders in the devout life, being humble, temperate, pure, kind, active, fervent, amiable, teachable, simple-minded, and obedient. Thomas à Kempis mentions several exemplary things concerning Lubert, but I must be content with this one.

There were two clerics talking between themselves concerning Lubert, one of whom said, 'It seems to me that Master Lubert assumes too austere a countenance, and when I would speak freely to him, I dare not.' The other answered, 'If you like, I will speak to him, and he will peradventure amend himself.' He therefore went to him and said, 'I want to speak openly to you upon a little matter.' And he replied, 'Very well.' He therefore said, 'There is a certain manner in you which is offensive; you are too abrupt, and look austere upon those who address you, so that they dare not come to you, and speak with you. You should be more affable and sweeter in your words, so that they may gladly come to you.' Then Master Lubert humbly responded, 'I will most readily amend myself in this respect by the grace of God, and I am grateful to you for having admonished me.' From that hour, adds à Kempis, Master Lubert was changed as it were into another man, and his countenance wore a joyful aspect towards those who approached him, while still preserving the propriety that was due.

This is a good illustration of the custom that prevailed among the Brothers of Common Life, that if one should see anything amiss in another Brother, he should not hesitate to tell him of his failing.

Some account of the closing scenes of his life is here given. Thomas à Kempis tells us that:—

When the plague was raging in Deventer and the surrounding country, many of the Brethren were withdrawn from this life, and as we may piously believe, were joined to those above in the Light Eternal. It happened, also, that Master Lubert was seized with the same plague. And behold, in the month of July, three

days before the Feast of the Blessed Mary Magdalene, he fell ill and took to his bed, saying that he was not to continue long in this world. We, on the other hand, laboured with many prayers to God for him, and remedies were sought from intelligent doctors, because his life was very precious to us all. But his prayers were heard beyond ours, and they were full of desires to be admitted among the heavenly citizens. One of the Brethren therefore said to him, 'We shall not be so long separated, but we shall soon hold our conferences (collationes) in Master Florentius's chamber.' 'No,' said he, 'not here any more, but in heaven above with the saints : ' for he had a desire to depart, and to be with Christ. On the Feast of St Mary Magdalene, he asked that the Sequence, *Laus Tibi, Christe*, might be sung in his room.

This Sequence, says Neale, which is one of the most beautiful of the kind called 'Notkerian,' is by Godeschalkus.

When it had been sung, he said, 'What devout and fervent words are these !'

Brother Amilius, who nursed him tenderly, continues Thomas à Kempis, heard many edifying words from his mouth, and carefully preserved all things which he said and did ; and wrote an account of them in a letter to the absent Brethren, after his death, setting forth his noble faith, that it might be a memorial to them ; in which the particulars of his happy death are fully made known. These brief records by Amilius are very interesting, and show us how the good Brother met his latter end. Among them it is recorded that at his desire Amilius wrote several letters to his own particular friends, to certain priests, and to religious persons at a distance in divers places. He also desired the Brethren living in the same house with him to come that he might speak to them. The scene was most touching Speaking of his life, and his

great purpose to devote himself to God, he acknowledged his many shortcomings, and how often he had offended. And then, with great humility, notwithstanding his debility, he prostrated himself on the ground, and with much abasement and many tears entreated forgiveness from every one of them. 'O, whose heart could be so hard,' exclaims Amilius, 'that he could restrain from shedding tears, when he perceived such a man, the most warm-hearted of Fathers and Brothers, thus humbling himself with tears prostrate on the floor?' Then rising from the ground, and leaning on his arm, he began again to speak to the Brethren exhorting them that they should faithfully and heartily preserve unity and love among themselves, and endeavour to live in subjection and obedience, to fraternally correct and admonish one another against vice and evil motions, and not to applaud or approve any negligence or failing. And with many such like words, begging the Brethren to pray for him, he bade them farewell.

His body was reverently buried in the cemetery of St Lebuin, next to John Kettel, his devout companion in the family of Christ, on the south side of the church, where many other Brethren, being buried at subsequent times, rest in peace.

CHAPTER VII.

Short Memoirs of other Brethren by à Kempis—His two singular Dreams—
He leaves Deventer, and enters the Monastery at Mount St Agnes—A
visit to the place.

THE memoirs which Thomas à Kempis gives are very simple sketches, but drawn with a faithful, loving hand; and in their plainness they have a beauty which will attract and impress the soul. I shall only bring forward a few short memoirs more, and then pass on.

I ought not to omit to mention (says à Kempis, in beginning the narrative of one of them) a man of great devotion and holy simplicity, and not less a priest of angelic purity. Moreover it is pleasing to note that he was one of the original Associates, and a most beloved co-presbyter with Master Lubert, and to offer a few words in commendation of him. This is MASTER HENRY BRUNE, the companion of Lubert, beloved of God and acceptable to men, kind to all and burdensome to none. He was born in Holland of honourable parents and lineage, and was a citizen of Leyden. Esteeming the riches and honours of the world as nothing, he avoided the admiration of his friends, sought the Lord in the days of his youth, and clave unto Him with a perfect heart unto old age. He continued to live obediently in the Brother-house of Master Florentius with all humility and with much gentleness, hearing the confessions of the Devotees, and celebrating the Divine Mysteries with great devotion and reverence; and without caring for temporal things, he lived in tranquillity and simplicity of heart; holding intercourse with the Brethren without quarrelling, being had in much esteem throughout all

Deventer, and regarded among the Religious in many places as an Israelite indeed, without guile and wickedness, like a dove without bitterness, endowed with singular innocency of life. His eyes were ever towards the Lord, and wheresoever he was able to be alone, he ceased not from prayer and devout meditation.

A Kempis then proceeds to give us an instance of this illustrative of the manner of man he was, for, he continues, sometimes when he sat near the fire in winter-time to warm his hands, he would turn his face toward the wall, and pray secretly during the time, observing a strict silence.

‘When I saw this,’ adds à Kempis, ‘I was much edified thereby, and loved him all the more because of it.’ And he further tells us that he never noticed an unbecoming word proceed from him, nor had he ever heard anyone complain about him, unless it were as to the manner in which he was wont to celebrate the Holy Sacrament. Yet in the manner of doing this he drew many laymen to the devout attendance of it: and indulgence was easily granted by him, because he was unwilling that the penitent should be separated from the beloved Jesus. A Kempis then relates three singular interpositions, which he almost regards as miracles, that happened in the ministrations of this priest for the confirmation of their faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which we need not here repeat.

Among the other virtues of ‘this pious and devout man,’ à Kempis mentions how humbly he submitted to his superior, ‘giving a good example to the priests and clerics, that none of them should, even if they were in Holy Orders, elevate themselves above their younger Brethren.’ By the permission of Father Florentius he

oftentimes on festival-days celebrated the Sacrament among the lepers; 'where I have,' adds à Kempis, 'at such times attended upon him.'

He lived thirty-nine years after à Kempis left Deventer, and died like a faithful soldier at his post of duty. It happened in the year 1439 that the pestilence broke out in Zutphen, where at that time some of the Brethren of the house of Master Florentius had migrated, and there dwelt with many other devout persons. Henry Brune was among the number of those smitten with the pestilence, and he came to his end, says à Kempis, confidently expecting the reward of his labour from the Lord. He had performed the priestly office forty-four years, and had far out-lived all those who begun the first fervour of the Institution. He laboured diligently in the work of writing, and yet I have often seen him, adds à Kempis, washing the kitchen utensils and doing other menial works. Moreover the sacred exercises which he early adopted, he continued until his death; for when he was interrupted by any cause from performing them, or omitted any of them, he quickly renewed them on the first opportunity; and if he became languid in the performance of them he stirred himself up again, as if it were the first day of his conversion. All his 'hours' he read until he breathed his last, nor did he omit the reading of the Holy Scriptures during his sickness, but sought consolation in the written Word of God rather than in the confabulations of men. He died in the above-named year, on the festival of St Bartholomew the Apostle, and was buried in the cemetery of St Walburga the Virgin.

I pass on now to the narrative of another of the early members of the 'New Devotion.'

There are two short accounts given by the hand of Thomas à Kempis respecting AMILIUS DE BUREN, of whom some mention has been already made, and who became the successor of Father Florentius in the government of the Brothers of Common Life at Deventer. One of these accounts is here found among the Biographies of the Early Brothers and Fathers; the other is a kind of 'In memoriam' of him, after his death, and is found among the records which Thomas kept of various events, added to the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes. From these accounts we learn that:—

Being filled beforehand with heavenly grace, and inspired by the Most High, he went to the House of Master Florentius, and, attracted by the piety of his discourses, he yielded himself to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, speaking by the mouth of the reverend Father, who gave to him admonitions of saving wisdom. Having then left the schools, and relinquished his carnal friends, the humble Brother became a disciple of Christ, and incited many by his example to renounce the world and become servants to Christ. Moreover he gave himself up to the performance of the most menial works of the house, not sparing his body for the health of his soul, or seeking his own advantage in temporal matters. And for the attainment of the virtue of holy obedience he also undertook the more laborious operations, performing them cheerfully, and faithfully executing what was required of him.

Many were surprised, continues à Kempis, that, with a body not particularly strong, he was able to undertake such labours, which he had not learned in the world, nor had previously been accustomed to, and which scarcely any one stronger would perform for worldly gain. But the love of Christ, and fraternal affection,

overcoming all things, he ministered of his strength with a good will, and laboured the more fervently that he might obtain a greater reward. After the death of Lubert and Gerard (probably Gerard Zerbolt) he was so acceptable to God, and to the Brethren, that he was immediately ordained priest, whilst Florentius was still living; and when he celebrated his first mass, Master Florentius arrayed him in his surplice, and was present until he had perfectly and devoutly completed his Office to the honour of God. This man, then, so remarkable for his piety, and for the faithful discharge of all his duties, was also a consolatory friend to all in a time of great necessity, for during the plague he undertook the care of the sick, and was prepared, out of obedience and fraternal love, to live or die with his Brethren. He it was who intrepidly stood by John Kettel, the cook of the House, and by Master Lubert, ministering to them until the close of life, and to many others laid low by the same disease.

Before his death he gathered the Brethren around him, and, confessing his past offences, prayed them with tears to forgive him if he had in any way offended them. He exhorted them to be obedient to him who should rule over them, as they had been to himself, and to preserve mutual love towards each other. As St John at the approach of death said to the members of the Church of Ephesus, as they gathered round him to hear his last words, so with his dying breath Amilius de Buren addressed the Brethren:—‘I know nothing more that I can say unto you, unless it be what the Lord said to His disciples just before His ascension: “that ye love one another” as Christ loved you, and

pray for me.' The Brethren all knelt down in prayer; and, feeling that they were about to lose their beloved Father and Ruler, they all wept bitterly. He was interred in the Cemetery of St Lebuin, next to Master Lubert, a priest of his House, where James de Viana was buried, and where many of the devout Brethren and Clerics of the Community of Florentius rest in peace.

I shall now relate what Thomas à Kempis tells us respecting JAMES DE VIANA.

Vigorous and refined in manner, he possessed the great grace of humility, compunction, and interior light; he strictly examined himself, and often sighed and wept over his daily defects. He also disclaimed as nothing in himself that for which another commended him, fearing the strict account that would have to be given of all he did to the Judge above, Who will not only judge open negligences, but the secret stains of the conscience. Far from his heart was it to be highly esteemed for wisdom, or wish to be reputed a good man, for he was pleased to serve anyone with whom he was connected, and it mattered not whether he were among the least or the greatest. He was a remarkable writer among writers, and showed great diligence in the writing and in the custody of books. When a certain young man sought to be instructed by him in the spiritual life, he at once from humility confessed that he himself was slothful and worthless, and had not yet perfectly attained to the beginning of virtue, but began to recommend certain of the younger Brethren, as fervent and intelligent, from whom he might learn much.

James of Viana lived a praiseworthy life, and desired to remain in the lowest position, and in the simple rank of a Cleric; yet, adds à Kempis:—

On account of his virtues and the remarkable gift of humility, he was promoted, by the good pleasure of God and by the advice of Florentius and his Brethren, to the Priesthood. This was, how-

ever, to him so serious a matter that he wept bitterly, when he perceived that he must needs be ordained. He confessed that he was too unworthy of such a rank, thinking that they had greatly erred who had given this advice, and had determined to advance so unfit a person. But the more he humbled himself, so much the more it pleased God, and the Brethren, and the more cheerfully did Florentius promote him. At this time, continues à Kempis, the priesthood was rare and precious among the Devotees. For unless a just person, and compelled for the common welfare, no one dared to accept this Holy Office; everyone avoided a higher rank, and preferred to remain in a humbler place, and lower office. Wherefore Master Florentius, who was the gem of priests, is reported once to have said: 'If I were not a priest, I should not have the care of others, and then I might be able more perfectly to amend myself, since a higher place gives frequent occasions of distraction, from which a good man under subjection is more free, living without the care of exterior things.'

On a certain occasion, we are informed, that when James wished to meditate upon his failings, he secretly ascended a terrace of the House, and, deeply sighing, he wrote down his faults in a little book, lest what he was minded to confess should pass into oblivion. On another occasion, when interrogated by a certain individual concerning the condition of those living in the Brotherhood, he said, 'If anyone desires to live with us, it is necessary that he humble himself and make himself less than all; then such a one has here a paradise, and is contented in the highest degree.'

Florentius found it necessary sometimes to check him, and to recall him to a moderate burden of compunction, lest by too great a rigour he should exceed the limits of discretion. But patiently bearing the rebuke, he humbled himself the more, because he had

acted with so little prudence. For his fervid spirit outstepped his natural strength, yet his pious intention excused him, because he sought wholly after God.

After these things bodily sickness assailed him; his strength failed gradually, and, making a good confession, he died shortly before Father Florentius, A.D. 1400, and was buried with his Brethren in the Cemetery of St Lebuin.¹

With the memoir of James de Viana, we close the series of portraits which à Kempis gives us of several of the early members of the Brotherhood of Common Life, into which he had been received whilst at Deventer.

In returning again to the account of à Kempis himself, there are two or three other matters which should be noticed as happening to him whilst at Deventer. First, he is said to have had a singular dream or vision, probably during the earlier portion of his sojourn there. The author on whose authority I give the account, states that Thomas à Kempis was accustomed among his other devotions to offer prayers and suffrages to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom he was lovingly attached. But, owing to the instability and changeableness of youth, he began to be very lax in performing this pious service; so that step by step he neglected to say his prayers and pay his devotions to her: first they were omitted for one day, then for two or three, then for four days together, till at length they were forgotten during the whole of the seven days, and at last, most grievous to relate, continues the writer, they were altogether given up. Now whilst this was the case, he saw himself, as in a night vision, standing in the large room

¹ Thom. à Kemp., *Vita Jacobi de Viana*, No. ix.

in the House of Florentius, where he had come, together with the other disciples, to hear the Divine Word, and as he bent forward with anxious ears to learn what was said, he beheld the Mistress of the world, coming down in the clouds of heaven, with a lovely countenance, and in shining raiment descend into the aforesaid room. She then went round to the Brethren who were listening to the Word of God, which was then being expounded, and having lovingly caressed first one and then another of the young students, she seemed to pour forth her thanks to them, because they were so zealous in attending to the pious admonitions, inasmuch as it shewed that the precious blood of her dear Son was not despised by the young men.

Beholding these things, continues the writer, and seeing the Virgin, blessed among women, warmly embrace the aforesaid Brethren with much tender affection, the youth stood faint with hope, while she still firmly turned away the light of her loving countenance from him, and he said to himself, 'I expect in a little while, when the Blessed Virgin has bestowed the seal of her affection sufficiently upon the rest, she will offer to me also the embrace of love, who, although I am not worthy of her, have still been her loving follower.' But, alas! how often do our hopes fall out contrary to what we wish, for instead of the sweet pledge of love he desired, he received a word of stern rebuke. For the Blessed Virgin, after she had most lovingly embraced each of the others, came to the aforesaid youth, and regarding him with a severe countenance said, 'In vain dost thou seek the embrace of holy love, who from a shameful neglect of friendship hast omitted to pay thy accustomed

devotions to me, as thou oughtest. Wherefore hast thou abandoned thy usual prayers? Has not love grown cold within thee, and thy desire for devotion become torpid, since thou didst adopt this inconstant habit? And now thou standest as if thou hadst not sinned, and lookest for an embrace with a bold face when thou deservest to be censured.' And turning away from him with an indignant look, she said, 'Depart, depart from me, because thou art judged to be unworthy of my embrace, when thou neglectest to pay the easy devotion of a loving soul.' And thus leaving him cut to the quick with merited shame, she disappeared, returning to heaven. Then Thomas awaking from the vision was pricked in his conscience, confessed his fault, and resolved upon amendment. And lest he should be again disappointed in not receiving the embraces of the Blessed Virgin, he no longer neglected to pay his *devoirs*, but diligently attended to this duty to the end of his life, without daring to omit it a single day.

I give the above account, much as it is written, for what it may be worth. There is some doubt, however, about the genuineness of the story, and it should therefore be taken with some reserve; for there is no allusion to it in the short account given by the contemporaneous biographer of Thomas, nor do the other two more ancient writers of his life, Badius and Tolensis, say anything about it, and they certainly had a better opportunity of knowing the veracity of what happened than one living long after their time could do.

There is another dream that à Kempis is said to have had about this time also, which should not be passed over without notice, though it is of a similar

character to the preceding one. And it is this, as I draw from the relation of it by the author, that, once upon a time, during these earlier years of his life, as Thomas lay musing upon his bed, between sleeping and waking, he believed that he saw the Devil appear personally to him in a very hideous form, whereupon he attempted to drive him away, as he had been taught to do when assaulted by bad thoughts from the Evil One, by repeating over the *Angelus*. This he did at first with a trembling voice, for he was greatly afraid. At this the Evil Spirit was but still more enraged, and approached the bed nearer and nearer to where he was lying, as it were to take him away; upon which Thomas became so terrified that he covered himself with the bed clothes, but still more earnestly continued the *Angelus*, till coming to the end of it, when the words OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST were pronounced by him with a loud voice, the Devil, as if thunderstruck with terror at this great name, which is above every name, could not stay any longer, but turned round dismayed, and was constrained to fly away. Now upon this, finding that Satan was not able to stand before the power of the Saviour's name, he began forthwith to take courage, and act with more boldness; so putting his head out of the bed clothes, and raising himself up, he repeated many times together that most sacred name, Jesus Christ, thereby pursuing the fugitive enemy; who the more precipitately fled away, the more strongly Thomas called upon the Lord Jesus, as the great captain of our salvation, before whose invoked presence he could not stand. Rejoicing over this great deliverance, as it appeared to him, the godly youth immediately returned thanks to God, and

said within himself, 'If by this most holy name Jesus, I can so easily baffle and discomfort the powers of hell, from this time forth I will not be, as hitherto I have been, so fearful of the plots of evil spirits, or waver in my faith, let them rage ever so much against me, and threaten my ruin.' Wherein it appears pretty evident whatever this transaction might be, that his sole refuge and help was placed in Jesus, and in no other whatsoever.¹

Whether Thomas à Kempis really did dream such a dream or see such a vision, we have not sufficient authority for determining: and there is not much necessity to consider the matter. Waiving, however, the superstitious notion that is mixed up in the above story, there is ample evidence to show that à Kempis firmly believed in the existence of the Devil and other evil spirits, and did faithfully inculcate great watchfulness against them, and an undying opposition to their insidious allurements and fierce assaults. See 'De Imit. Chr.,' lib. i. 13, lib. iii. 6, and 'Doctrinale Juvenum,' ch. viii. sec. 2.

Thomas à Kempis continued at Deventer about seven years; and from being only a scholar in the public school under Boehme, assisted by the Brothers of Common Life, he came to be regarded as one of the Brothers also himself, and to take his place as such among them, adopting their habits and mode of life, and gradually imbibing the spirit and principles which pervaded them. Naturally inclined to a quiet, contemplative, and interior life, and having from childhood

¹ From the book commonly called *Speculum Exemplorum*, pp. 24, 25, sec. 8.

been inured to the hardier virtues of the Christian life, he heartily entered upon the self-denying, unobtrusive, and godly course of living which they pursued; and with all the fresh fervour of a young disciple he sought to advance in the grace and devotion for which they were worthily esteemed. Constantly through his writings do we gain a glimpse of that peculiar spirit of the new life which had developed itself, and which is more or less present on the awakening of true religion among men; for the best form of practical mysticism was manifest, which consisted in that constant training of the soul, and bringing it daily more and more into conformity to the image of God as reflected in the Person of Christ Jesus, a resting in the consciousness of His presence and favour, with, what is specially said of à Kempis, 'a quiet throbbing of inward happiness and tranquil content which diffuses its genial warmth on every side.'

It must not be supposed, however, that his advance in grace and holiness at this time was unattended by any earnest endeavour—that all came easily to him—that there was no serious struggle on his part to attain to this higher standard of living—that it all came naturally—and that he did not feel his constant need of Divine help. It is true that as he grew in years he grew in grace and in the knowledge of Divine things, but it is true also that it was by perpetually striving against the sinful and carnal desires that rose up within him, and by tenaciously keeping hold of God, and seeking His aid through the various means of grace. Life was opening out to à Kempis, when the lusts of the flesh, and all that is in the world, the lust of the eyes, and the pride

of life became strong within him: and these beset him and sought to take hold of him, and to bind him down. These he had to combat, and over and over again had with resolute vigour to keep in subjection, and in place thereof to welcome and cultivate all those desires and efforts which contributed to a higher and purer life. That there was many a conflict between his soul and the carnal desires of the old man within him is evident from what he says. For example see '*De Imit. Chr.*,' lib. iii. cap. lv. 1, 2.

When à Kempis had been five or six years at Deventer, Florentius appears to have received him into his own House, where he resided with a larger number of the Brothers to what dwelt in the other House where Thomas had been living. A strong affection had sprung up in the breast of Florentius for à Kempis; for he was a young man after his own heart, and he used to regard and speak of him as his own son in the faith. The days of Florentius seemed now to be numbered; he had been fast ripening for heaven; to all about him he seemed as if he were not long to be with them, for even now he appeared as if he was ready to spread the wings of his soul, and fly away to the realms of eternal bliss. A Kempis regarded it as a peculiar privilege to be brought into closer contact, and more intimate fellowship with such a saintly man than he was wont, and gladly ministered to the necessities of his beloved master. Many opportunities had he of listening to the devout breathings and pious words which were uttered in hours when Florentius was withdrawn by sickness from active life; and his earnest teachable mind readily opened itself to receive the finer touches

of spiritual influence, which were likely to emanate from such a man in such moments.

Many months passed away in this closer and familiar intercourse; and Florentius might naturally have desired to keep by his side still longer, a young man of such rare simplicity and piety, and who gave such promise of devotion to God; and the more so, since Florentius had become so infirm, and seemed to need the sympathy and attention of some such a loving, tender soul as that of à Kempis near him. But this true saint of God thought not of himself, nor heeded what his natural likings or affections might be, but considered only what would be likely to promote the welfare of the individual he loved, and the glory of God. It will be remembered that à Kempis, in concluding the life of this spiritual Father, makes allusion to the number of persons Florentius, having trained and confirmed in the Christian life, had sent forth to various places to further the work of bringing souls anew to God, and building them up in the life of Christ; Thomas was one of the number, and now the time had come for him to make his deliberate choice for life, whether or no he would give himself in this way wholly to God, and go forth to other parts to do Him service.

And so it came to pass, as we learn from one of the old biographers of Thomas, that upon a certain festival, the Divine rites being performed, Florentius, having observed that his pupil Malleolus (another name as will be remembered given to Thomas à Kempis) was more cheerful than usual, called him to come to him into his bedroom, and thus began to address him:—‘O Thomas, my son, most dear in the Lord, the time approaches

when you must determine your future career, when and what sort of person you are to be, and what kind of life you wish to follow.'

And after further earnest conversation with him, he concludes by saying: 'But perhaps you will ask to be informed what order of religious persons I would most strongly recommend, for there are very many. But among these, that which has been founded among us seems the best, which our most excellent father, Gerard the Great, left to us when dying, as the most commendable, viz.: that of the Canons living under the rule of the godly Father Augustine; and of this Order—as you know—we have lately erected two Colleges (*collegia*).'

To these things the most excellent young man, Thomas, says the historian, was able after awhile to mutter with trembling voice: 'For some time past, Father, I have now desired this with many prayers, even hoping for the opportunity which you give me. Since I have a brother-german in Windesheim, I would that your love would cause that I may find a place among the very dear disciples in Mount St Agnes.' 'I will try,' said Florentius; and on the following day he gave him letters to the principal of the convent.

Very touching must have been the parting farewell, when Thomas à Kempis came to wish 'good-bye' to the Brothers at Deventer, and his dear spiritual friend and director Florentius. The latter was now in a very feeble state of health, and there seemed little chance of his life being prolonged many days, so that the separation would be regarded by both as final, with respect to ever seeing each other again in this world. And though we have no tidings or allusion to their last

interview, yet one may well imagine how the sadness of the tender leave-taking was lighted up with the glow of spiritual hope, that the parting would be but for a time, and that they would hereafter meet again in the presence of their loving and all-glorious Redeemer.

Bearing away with him the blessing and recommendations of Florentius, Thomas started on his journey.

On his way to his future home à Kempis must needs pass not far from Windesheim. The monastery, which had now been fourteen years in existence, had considerably increased in size, and in the number of its inmates. The place was not unknown to Thomas. He had been there before; seven years previous to this time he had come hither to seek his brother John, and take counsel with him about the future; and now he was passing by the spot to join this brother in another place.

We have certain information, also, that on his way to Mount St Agnes he stayed at Zwolle, a town not far distant, through which he had to pass. The object of his stay at Zwolle was that he might participate in the Indulgence granted by Pope Boniface IX., which was at that time bestowed on all those who piously visited the Church of St Michael in that town, which was then in the course of being restored, and who contributed something towards its reparation and adornment. Such ordinances have indeed led to much evil, and have accordingly been rejected by the Church of England.

The road to Mount St Agnes is level, as is the country around; and it is only as you approach the site of the monastery that you gain any elevation. The

place is now called Agnietenberg. It was a delightful day when I visited it in the autumn of the year 1875. The situation is pleasant and healthy. A fine, genial, bracing air wafted softly across these downs, which was very refreshing, and helped to bring my mind in tune for spending a few leisure moments and lingering meditatively about the spots where the saintly Thomas had lived so long; and here I wandered about pondering upon the earnest piety once exhibited in this place. I had left Zwolle by the 'Dieserstraat,' and taken the road which in all likelihood Thomas had taken centuries before, and in a short time arrived at the spot. There are now but a few isolated dwellings in the immediate neighbourhood. A farm-house or two, the auberge, and the school with a school-house; and not far distant other houses are to be found. This school was at the end of a large open burial ground, which was in all probability the site of the ancient church or chapel of the monastery; for though few traces of it are to be found, and little information to be gleaned from the inhabitants of what formerly existed in the place, I observed that several of the grave-stones or posts, which had numbers on them to indicate the spot where the remains of loved relatives were buried, had evidently at one time been window-mullions or door-sills, and had been taken from some superior building and utilized for the necessities of the place. While walking about the cemetery four men came, and, going to a building near, brought out spades, and began to dig a grave for some one whom they were about to inter; and, from what I could gather, I learned that this spot was a favourite burial-place for the people of Zwolle.

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At the lower end of the grave-yard, in the small field adjoining and lying towards Zwolle, I could trace the foundations of some building that evidently dated far back, for three sides of a square were clearly marked by the mounds which were visible. I entered the school, and found the children very busy at work, very orderly, and apparently well-taught; and most pleasing was it to know that here, in the locality where Thomas à Kempis had himself taught others the knowledge of the spiritual life, there was to be found an excellent mixed school, where the children of the surrounding neighbourhood might receive a good education. The site of the monastery itself was in all probability on another elevation—in all likelihood on the place where the auberge now stands; such is the belief. Here I got some refreshment of bread and milk; and in the room where I sat I saw an old coloured drawing of Thomas à Kempis sitting in the neighbourhood of Mount St Agnes, with a book in his hand, and two or three other books around him, with an ink-horn, having a receptacle for pens, resting on them. He appears advanced in years, with a large and thoughtful face somewhat elongated by age; a calm serenity is seen in his expression which seems to speak of a soul at peace with God. On his head he wears a cap, something like a 'biretta,' but different from that worn by the Roman Catholic priests at the present time; he is dressed in the white habit of his Order; and over his shoulders there is a cape or rug, with a fringe.

The drawing is taken from an old copy, and the features are very similar to the authentic portrait of him to be seen in Zwolle, which is in a very decayed

state. There is to be seen also in the picture a representation of the place as it was in Thomas à Kempis's time. On the higher elevation we have the monastery and its outer buildings; lower down among the trees is the church, and on another side we have the wind-mill for grinding the corn. In the distance we have a view of Zwolle and of the surrounding country; for from another of the elevations, covered with a plantation of low oak-trees, with numerous pleasant walks, having a summer-house in the centre and at the highest point, the tops of the houses, and the tower of St Michael's Church with its spire, and the turrets of the Sassenpoort-gate can be easily distinguished. I tried to procure this drawing on the wall of the auberge, but in vain. It belonged to the place and was needful for the maintenance of its celebrity. In vain also I tried to procure a copy of it in Zwolle; but my kind friend Mr Th. van Riemsdijk afterwards, on my return home, obtained one for me from a Mr van Doorminck, the Archivist of the province of Overyssel, who was much interested in all things concerning Thomas à Kempis, and kindly forwarded it to me.

The House at Mount St Agnes was, at the time Thomas went thither, very poor and little known, or resorted to; it was therefore the more agreeable to him, since he could here best lie hid, and remain undistracted by the changes and turmoil of a busy world, and at the same time enjoy the friendship of a few earnest-minded men, with whom he could freely converse on the things of God. The Brother-house at Deventer was in the town; this was in the country where there were but few habitations. It was in the

year 1399, when nearly twenty years old, that à Kempis went to the Monastery of Mount St Agnes, and, making a most urgent request for a place, was received by his only brother John with tender affection and much joy. One great desire of their lives had been accomplished, that they might be brought together and be united in the service of God; and it is said of them that they were both so sensible of the blessing that, when reflecting and talking over this gracious providence of God, they cried out together in those joyful words of the Psalmist, 'O how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' And many were the sweet and sacred discourses that these two brothers-german had together, mutually inciting and edifying one another to the increase of each other in grace, and in the knowledge and love of our Saviour Jesus Christ. It was another great advantage to promoting the perfection of Thomas's saintly character that he should have such a brother nigh at hand, whom he might look up to, and at all times consult about the welfare of his own soul, and how he might best serve God and glorify His holy name. It is thought that by his advice, and probably under his direction at first, Thomas was induced to write some short devotional works, which were primarily spread abroad without his name, for the instruction and guidance of devout souls. This, however, came later on, when he had been there some little time, though probably one or two were begun with scattered pieces, which formed part of another work, before his novitiate came to a close.

Five years did Thomas pass in his novitiate as a candidate for the religious life, that he might thoroughly

know his own mind and try well how such a kind of life would agree with him, 'for he foresaw,' says his biographer, 'the greater danger of entering rashly into such a state without all that caution and preparation which both divine and human prudence do absolutely require.' It was likewise a custom at that time to try the candidates generally for a long period, or at least till they were thoroughly proved and tried before they were allowed to take the habit upon them.

A deep enthusiasm stirred within his breast, a fervent zeal animated his soul, which this season of preparation and probation was well calculated to deepen and strengthen, and bring to a mature and settled resolve. Fortunately à Kempis has left in his writings many passages, or fervid outpourings of his soul, which reveal to us the sentiments and feelings of his inner life during his early career at the Convent of St Agnes. And there is one which seems very fitly to apply to his first calm moments when he obtained a settled place in the Brotherhood here. It affords us a beautiful transcript of the state of his soul at this solemn period, and I shall here give a few extracts from it:—

Oh, how salutary, how pleasant, and how sweet it is to dwell in solitude, to hold one's peace, and to speak with God, and so enjoy the sole chief good, in whom all good things are contained!

Would that I were so united to that most simple and only good, as to be moved by no affections and distractions of fleeting matters; would that I did not yield to any visible things, by curiously fixing my gaze upon them and turning to them! . . .

For I was made to love and enjoy Thee, but by inordinately following created things I have lost Thee, and found no rest for my heart in them.

Convert me, O Lord, unto Thee, and leave me not to run after

earthly things since Thou hast worthily promised the heavenly to them that follow Thee. . . .

Wander not, my soul, after vanities and false extravagances, but turn to the Lord thy God, for He is the fountain of all consolation.

Whatsoever thou seekest in man, or in the creatures, thou wilt lose, and wilt be sensible of thy loss too, because, though they may have some semblance of good, yet is there nothing durable in them.

Happy is that soul which entrusts herself to God, that He may do what seemeth good to Him.

Happy is that soul which never seeks her own glory ; never desires her own will to be done ; but designs, loves, and purposes the glory and will of God in all things.

Happy, in short, is that soul which weans herself from all things temporal, and keeps herself pure in all her actions, as in the sight of God.

Oh soul, that art in such a condition, rejoice and be exceeding glad, because thou canst now be engaged with the inner and heavenly, and canst praise God night and day.

Happy and blessed of God is that soul whose longings are raised upwards ; whose hands and arms are stretched forth as the two wings of the cherubim ; whose whole vigour and labour is interior, mounts upward, and returns not until she finds Him whom she loves beyond all others.

And when she hath found Him, then forgetting all, she follows Him whithersoever the Beloved shall wish and shall lead her.

And when He has spoken she will rejoice at His voice, which says to her, ' I am solely thy Beloved, thine Elect. I am thy exceeding great reward. Be thou humble in prosperity, and strong in adversity.

' Behold how they that love Me are comforted by Me. How sweetly, thinkest thou, they will be treated when they have laid aside all the troubles of the body and soul, and shall be received up into eternal rest.'

O that I could enjoy such sweetness as a holy soul does that is beloved of God, and devoted to Him ! when, the senses lulled,

she is borne upwards in spirit, and raised above herself to the embraces of the Beloved, and is united to God by the bond of intimate love. . . .

My God, when Thou enterest into the soul that loves Thee, wilt Thou not feed her with milk, and, out of the abundance of Thy sweetness, sometimes even led her out of herself, to embrace Thee, without any bodily image?

Henceforward Thou makest her to trust most fully in Thee, concerning the eternal rest and the fellowship of the saints; because, by giving beforehand an earnest of spiritual grace, Thou makest her stronger in hoping for that which is unseen, and in despising the present which is perceived by the senses.

Be mindful of me, a poor beggar, O gracious Father, through the bowels of Thy mercy, and send down the true bread from Heaven, even Thy good Word full of consolation and grace.

What was called the rule of St Augustine as observed by the Brethren of Mount St Agnes, and which they were enjoined to read over at least once a week, may be briefly summed up under the following heads:—

I. To observe the fundamental law of Love: first, towards God, then towards our neighbour, according to its just extent, and to imitate the example of the Mother Church of Jerusalem in union of heart, and in sharing with others the goods we possess.

II. To learn the lesson of Humility, according to the most perfect pattern set forth in the life of Christ, and in that of his nearest and most faithful followers; and especially in this, that the greatest among them should be as the younger, and he that is chief as he that doth serve.

III. To observe carefully the stated or canonical ‘hours,’ and times of prayer; and to prepare both body and soul for it by due retirement, meditation, and fasting.

IV. To take care that the soul and body be both fed at the same time, by a prudent appointment of some spiritual entertainment at meals, as by reading some sacred book, or by a conference on holy matters, or by singing some devout songs or canticles.

V. To take charge of the sick and infirm wherever they be found, and so far as we are capable, and to do them all the service in our power for their bodily and spiritual welfare.

VI. To be without any affectation or singularity in dress, and in all the other externals of life; and to regard above all things the acquisition of internal purity and the fashioning our lives into a conformity to the will of God.

VII. Humbly and affectionately to give and receive fraternal correction and admonition from one another, meekly to confess our faults one to another, gladly to submit ourselves to the reproof or chastisement of our Superior, and resolutely keep up the true discipline of the Gospel.

VIII. To do all we possibly can for the general good and interest of the Community; to be diligent in our duties and callings, never to be idle, or to wander curiously about, and to be content with the distribution of the common funds, though not altogether so favourable to ourselves as might be expected.

IX. Not to neglect outward cleanliness and decency, but to look to the due discharge of outward things for the sake of the inward; and to take proper care of the body for the sake of the soul, both in health and sickness.

X. To be obedient to our Superior for God's sake,

to faithfully and kindly observe our relative duties towards the other members of the Society, to be ready to ask pardon and to forgive offences in the spirit of Christ our Lord, but not so as to weaken authority.

Here we have the sum and substance of the Rule by which Thomas à Kempis and his Brethren at Mount St Agnes strove to regulate their lives.

The monastery here where à Kempis had recently found a home was in its very infancy; scarcely a year and a half had passed since it had been duly constituted, and its first Prior elected. There had been, however, for some time previous to this, a House for the Brothers of Common Life in the immediate neighbourhood, which paved the way for the establishment of a monastery. Many difficulties and privations had to be overcome and endured ere the latter fairly struggled into existence. Thomas à Kempis gives an account of these; and in the next chapter I propose to recount the more interesting of the particulars he relates, introducing them with some information respecting the character and history of the neighbouring town of Zwolle, where there was a Brother-house of the Society, and where à Kempis had a few warm friends, and which could be discerned from Mount St Agnes where he lived. It will be desirable here also to give an account of the origin and character of the reformed monastery at Windesheim, projected by Gerard Groote, of which the monastery at Mount St Agnes was an offshoot, and affiliated community.

CHAPTER VIII.

A description of Zwolle—The first Settlement of the Brothers in that neighbourhood—The Origin and Character of the Reformed Monasteries—The founding of one at Mount St Agnes, where à Kempis was received.

1889- THE pretty town of Zwolle, where the bones of Thomas à Kempis now lie, and near to which he lived for so many years, is entirely surrounded by water, being situated between two small rivers, the Zwartewater and the Yssel, which here make a junction. It is entered by three or four drawbridges; and along the banks of the streams there are a few better houses, with pleasant gardens dipping down to the water. In the broader parts of the stream several vessels ply up and down, among which are three small steamers, one of which goes to Amsterdam. There are now about 20,000 inhabitants in Zwolle, of whom about 15,000 are Protestants and 5000 Roman Catholics. It forms the capital of the province of Over-Yssel; and, in addition to its beautiful promenades, possesses some fine streets and pretty squares, which gives it, 'pardon the expression,' says a modern writer, 'a very saucy look.' The commerce of the place is considerable; and the number of carts passing through the streets—which in the interior of the town are lined with shops—the busy, active habits of the people, and the crowded market-places, all show that a thriving trade is carried on. There is an order, cleanliness, and respectability observable too, which it

was pleasing to notice. The people seemed happy and contented, not sluggishly so, like the Italians, or those in the East, for all seemed to have something to do, and went about their work with a will and purpose. In the early part of the evening, at the time of the year when I visited the town, several groups of children were playing in the streets, joining hands together, talking freely and laughing merrily; and later on a military band played some lively tunes under the trees in the large square near St Michael's Church; while the young men and maidens thronged the promenade and paced up and down amidst their elders, who were among them, enjoying the evening air and gossiping with their friends.

A pleasing writer, speaking of the place, says: 'One would scarcely imagine in looking at all these charming streets, clean, coquettish, and prettily arranged houses and grand shops abundantly provided, that the existence of this charming city had four or five times been in danger of destruction from war, flood, and fire.

"Added to these calamities of fire and water, the pretty town of Zwolle fell a victim to pestilential diseases, which ravaged the population to a fearful extent. Perhaps there is no town in Holland which has suffered so considerably from epidemics of all kinds as Zwolle. In 1398, the year before Thomas came there, the plague, called the black sickness (*peste noire*) devastated the poor city for the space of many months, carrying off victims at the rate of eighty a day, and not only from the town itself, but from the outlying villages, a rate of mortality which was enormous in proportion to the num-

ber of the inhabitants. The summer of 1422 was almost as fatal to the population as that of 1398, the number of deaths being so increased that they could not find grave-diggers to bury the dead. In 1440, 1450, 1453, 1458, during which years Thomas à Kempis still lived not very far off, this epidemic raged with violence.

"The churches and a few rare old houses are the principal remarkable monuments, besides a grand old gate-house with its fine pointed spires. This gate-house is called the 'Sassenpoort,' and is the only one remaining out of several; its massive form rising above the houses which surround it (which take the place of the ancient city walls) with an air of proud superiority."

The only two churches in Zwolle which are interesting from an archæological point of view are Notre Dame and St Michael, of which the latter is certainly the most important and the most beautiful. The immediate environs of the town offer to the inhabitants many charming spots for excursion and recreation. There is one lovely promenade, through an avenue of trees a hundred years old, to a place called 'Katerveer,' where on Sundays the inhabitants flock in crowds to enjoy the beauty of the landscape and the exquisite delight of the long walk. From Katerveer one can see the Yssel winding its silvery waters through green meadows and wooded knolls, like an enormous serpent folding its coils on a green velvet carpet. Nothing can be more charming than this beautiful country; and the pleasing impression it produces at first sight is greatly enhanced by coming suddenly upon it after wandering for some time in a monotonous country, full of flats, where the only thing

that forms a line against the horizon is a sheep grazing or a cow chewing its cud.

We need only now to add a short anecdote about the inhabitants of Zwolle. Once they possessed, it is said, a famous peal of bells; but for some reason they sold it to the burgesses of Amsterdam, and it is now in the Westerkirk. To vex the Zwollenarens, who probably thought they had made a good bargain, the Amsterdamers paid the money in brass coin, which was so troublesome to count that the fingers of the counters turned blue; and from this circumstance it arises that the inhabitants of Zwolle are nicknamed 'blue-fingers.'¹

The succeeding annals of the monastery at Mount St Agnes will show that the contiguity of the town of Zwolle frequently affected its interests. Previous to the founding of the monastery a settlement of the Brothers of Common Life was established here. There are many interesting details respecting both one and the other, as told by à Kempis in his *Chronicles*, from which I shall make a selection.

There were in the city of Zwolle certain faithful men, wholly converted to God by Master Gerard the Great. These men had built for themselves a House in a certain quarter of the city, near to the old Convent of the Beguines, where they might collectively serve God with all humility and devotion. The chief among these were John de Ummen—a man dedicated to God and much beloved by Master Gerard—Wychmann Rurinck, and Reyner Leon de Rhine, with two or three other

¹ For many of the particulars here given, the author is indebted to Plantenga La Hollande, and *The Dead Cities of the Zuyder Zee*, by Henry Havard, tr. by Annie Wood.

men of like good character. A certain clergyman, also dwelling in the same neighbourhood, joined them, named Wittecoep, to whom they gave heed, for he discoursed very fervently upon sacred subjects. The mother of John de Ummen, Regeland by name, a widow of mature years, also joined them, who carefully looked after the House, and faithfully ministered to the servants of God, as Martha did to our Lord. These individuals listened most diligently to the Word of God. Whilst these servants of God were thus living together in holy poverty, many persons wishing to lead a devout life were drawn to them out of the world, and, desiring to serve God, they relinquished the world in the hope of eternal gain.

On one occasion during a Lenten season the venerable Master Gerard came to Zwolle, and for the purpose of strengthening his sons in the faith, he for several days exhorted them in things necessary to their souls' welfare. Very solicitous was he to draw them from the love of the world, and refresh them with the word of comfort. When, therefore, a great multitude of people were assembled to hear him preach, many devoutly submitted themselves to his counsels. And, adds Thomas à Kempis, the good saw this and rejoiced; but the wicked gnashed upon him with their teeth, and cursed.

One there was among these citizens more bold than the rest, who as yet took greater pleasure in worldly things than in those pertaining to the kingdom of God, that came to him, questioning his words and actions. 'Why,' said he, 'do you disquiet us, and why do you introduce new customs? Give up this kind of preaching, and do not trouble and terrify men.' He at once and

wisely replied, 'I cannot willingly suffer you to go to hell.' To which the other indignantly answered, 'You must, however, permit us to go to hell in peace.' To this the benign and pious master said, 'This I cannot do. If you do not wish to hear me, there are others who will willingly listen to me.' After this, certain of his disciples, dwelling in that place, mindful of the above-named opposition, went to him privately, and preferred a request that they might live in a more secluded place by themselves, because they could not continue as they were, buffeting with these worldly men, without injury to their souls. They then besought him, with filial affection, that he would of his paternal regard go with them a little way without the gates of the city to look for a suitable place of retirement. He graciously listened to their request, and appointed the following day to accompany them on their search.

When they set out, however, as Thomas à Kempis tells the tale, the weather was very unfavourable; but neither the wind nor the rain retarded their master from starting on his journey with them. For he went forwards joyfully, and said sweetly to his companions, 'I will go first and shield the wind from you with my gown.' On approaching the place where they took a turn in the mount, and while surveying the circuit of the hills a short space, they beheld a certain valley, both narrow and deep towards the north side, and his disciples said unto him, 'Behold, beloved master, how excellent and secluded a spot this is, to which we may retire for the love of Christ, and where we may lie hid, just as the holy hermit fathers did in the mountains and caves of the earth.' But the wise and prudent man

withstood their suggestion, and dissuaded them from the idea, because the place was low in situation, neither was it by any means a desirable locality on the score of health for those who should succeed them. Therefore, carefully retracing their steps, they visited another mount in the vicinity ; on beholding a level ground suitable for corn lying towards the south, the sagacious man said to those standing about him, 'Behold, at the foot of this mountain fix your tabernacle, since you will be able to prepare the level portion as a garden for herbs for yourselves, and where you can have fruit-trees also. And if God spare my life I will often come here to be with you.' Considering their inspection and survey had been inspired by God, they once more retraced their steps, committing the issue of events to the good pleasure of God. But alas ! in the same year the much beloved Master Gerard, the glory and light of devotion in the province of Utrecht, was taken from the world that he might enjoy the reward of his labours, ascending from the valley of our tears to the mount of eternal blessedness.

Not long after this, however, the work was taken in hand. Those who had accompanied Gerard to select a place for themselves, and two other leading men who joined in the work, first obtained the portion of land pointed out from the two proprietors of the soil, and commenced operations.

In building the House they were often in want of materials, and had to endure many hardships. When they wanted to eat they must either bring food with them, or return to Zwolle ; they were very poor, but some of their Brethren, who wished for its completion,

would at times come and visit them, and, remaining all night, would sleep on the straw in their garments. Other inconveniences and difficulties they had to encounter, but, sustained and animated by a holy joy and sweet enthusiasm, that they were building for themselves, and for others of like mind, an habitation away from the turmoil and strife of the world, where they might live and serve God in all godly quietness, they in the fulness of their hearts toiled on; and thus the good work advanced, till at last, through various obstacles, it was brought to a completion.

This religious House having been constructed on the mount, and a number of devout men being gathered together to serve God in humility and simplicity, the farmers Bercem and Nemel, owners of the soil, gave and assigned to them and to their successors a further grant of land, where they had chosen a place for preaching and for the worship of God. Many honourable persons also contributed to this pious expense. All was finished and completed, however, A.D. 1386, just a year and a half after the death of Gerard.

Outwardly, indeed, the members of this community led a life of poverty and toil for Christ's sake, but a love of the celestial life sweetened their resolute abstinence. If one of their number had to go abroad on some matter of business he offered a short prayer to God before setting out. For a long time, therefore, they were thus accustomed to live a social life; and this was continued when the monastic institution was set on foot, since all the devout clerics and laics were humbly obedient to their first Rector, John de Ummen—a very active man and well skilled in spiritual matters.

Fraternal correction was administered for the least negligence, and the Brother who offended was enjoined that he must be more guarded for the future; nor was any mere excuse allowed, but everyone had humbly to acknowledge his fault, and make a profession of prompt amendment. If anyone was not prepared to obey, or pertinaciously persevered in his own opinion, Father John reproved him severely, and pronounced a sentence according to the measure of the fault, and the quality of the individual. Sometimes also he was incited to a greater display of discipline in order to inspire a salutary fear in others, and would say to certain contentious persons, and to such as did not readily obey his injunctions: 'Behold, the door is open; if anyone wishes to go, let him depart.' Thus they must either behave better and yield a ready disobedience, or leave the Society.

Yet among all these trials, and though engaged with important matters, the Rector was of a sympathetic and benign disposition, for he had the rare grace of comforting all that came to him, whatever their cause of grief. On this account it was that Gerard, whilst alive, sent many to him, that he might instruct them in the way of God, saying: 'Go to blind John de Ummen, a devout and virtuous man, and whatever he tells you to do, do it.' Concerning whom also he gave this testimony, that 'the blind man saw better than all the people that dwelt in Zwolle.' For though he lacked corporeal light, yet was he inwardly illuminated with the light of truth; and to many that came to him, he showed the way of eternal salvation and was manifestly a holder forth of the true light.

There was moreover among the primitive Brethren such a vehement fervour of delight in each other's society, that one could hardly do enough by lowly deeds to gain the regard of another; who in turn was himself inflamed to yield compliance to the wishes of his comrade.

Thomas also alludes to the penury experienced by the Brethren in the early days of the House, both as regards food and clothing, and how God wonderfully provided for them. It happened on one occasion that having consumed almost all the food, the cook was in great distress, and made known to Father John their lack of means for the morrow, saying, 'What shall I provide for to-morrow?' The worthy rector consoled his distress with gracious words, and exhorted him to have confidence in God, who never forsook those who put their trust in Him. And so it happened that late in the evening of that very day, behold Father Everard de Eza, the curé of Almelo, came unexpectedly in his vehicle, as if he had been sent by God for the consolation of the poor Brethren, and was received by them with much consideration and alacrity, since he brought in an opportune hospitality. For he loved the House, and all who dwelt there, on account of their exalted poverty and simplicity of manners, and because they were themselves mindful to hurt no one, but were profitable to all men. He was also united to Father John in the special bonds of love. On which account when it was needful for him to take a journey to Windesheim or Zwolle, he gladly called upon the Brethren in the Mount on his way thither.

Thomas à Kempis makes mention also of the kind-

ness of Gerard Bronchorst, a canon of Utrecht, 'a great lover of the Devotees,' who had been preferred to Deventer, where he died. He specially alluded to the gift of two cows which the aforesaid benefactor made to the Brethren in the Mount. But, adds Thomas, 'God was pleased in this matter to try their patience and increase their faith, for one of these cows died, whilst the other continued in sound health.' But here the wonderful goodness of God was again manifest, for this remaining cow yielded such an abundance of milk that it sufficed for all, so that it was thought that they could not have obtained more from the two by ordinary estimate.

Many other little acts of kindness are named; as, for instance, when certain persons from Zwolle came to fish in the river Vetch, and inviting some of the poor Brethren to assist them, they cast their nets in the name of Jesus, and caught an innumerable quantity of the fish, which they kindly gave to them. This fish, so freely tendered, was much esteemed at the time; for at the beginning of their foundation, as Thomas intimates, the Brethren were much despised by worldly people, and were often openly derided by those who passed by, and called them by opprobrious names; and further, that they had to endure many contentions and molestations, arising from jealousy. But the patience of the pious Brethren overcame the maliciousness of the wicked. And the enjoyment of a good conscience brought them greater gladness, by reason of the contempt they had to pass through.

After the consecration of the first chapel, the desires of the Brethren were stirred up for nearly three years

to the building of a monastery; and in the accomplishing of this the senior Brethren with their Rector were chiefly occupied, and hastened all necessary requirements for prosecuting and finishing the work. And here, before I narrate what Thomas à Kempis tells us about this Monastery of Mount St Agnes, where he had come to dwell and where he lived so long, and what happened during his life there, it seems desirable that I should give some account of the origin and character of these reformed monasteries, of which St Agnes was one.

When Gerard the Great lay on his death-bed, and his sorrowing disciples were standing around him to catch his dying words, he gave instructions concerning the formation and establishment of a monastery of Canons Regular of the Order of St Augustine. The design had been in his mind for some years previous, but untoward circumstances had prevented its being carried out. Just before his illness, as already alluded to in the brief sketch of his life, a way to the consummation of his wishes was marvellously opened to him; he was just permitted to behold the means for the accomplishment of his desire laid at his feet, when he must leave the work to be carried out by others. It happened as one, who in modern times most resembled him, and who carried on another evangelical work in a like spirit, once fitly said, 'God buries His workers, but carries on His work.'¹ But though he had considered the matter well over, and had matured his plans in his own mind, he had not fully communicated them to those about him. He had felt that some other safeguard was

¹ John Wesley.

necessary for the well-being and protection of the several institutions of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, which now existed in several places, and of those which were likely to spring up in other quarters. He seems to have looked forward to the time when he should be taken from them; and he feared that when this should be the case, and he was no longer able to defend the societies, their enemies would again attack them, and that they might be more easily broken up, and the Brethren dispersed; or it might be that divisions or disaffections, or disorders of one kind or another, might arise among them, which might lead to their disintegration, or gradual decline, and they would fall away from their original purpose—from the purity and holy ardour with which they started, as many other like religious bodies had done. And as far as human means and provisions could do, he wanted to prevent this.

If then, he considered with himself, there were some central authority of higher standing to which they would be subservient, and to which they could appeal for support and counsel in cases of emergency, and if this authority or supreme power over all the communities were centred in a well-ordered religious body, sanctioned by the ecclesiastical rulers, there would be a better chance of keeping the Brothers together, that they would be less likely to be corrupted by the evil influences from without, and at the same time would be sheltered from the malicious machinations and assaults of the mendicant Friars, and other people who had no kindly feeling towards them, than if they were left to themselves. To this end, therefore, he gave instructions

for the organisation of the Order, which Thomas à Kempis afterwards joined, and the way in which it was to be carried on; how some of the more earnest and devoted spirits among them should be selected to enter this Order, and that these pious men having chosen a head or ruler, should be an example and a governing body to the others, a higher kind of Brotherhood, to which the devout of both sexes might look, as their guardians and superiors, and from among whom they might always find some one or other of devout mind to rule over them, and take the guidance of the several institutions which were spreading over the land. They were to receive into their monasteries as well as into the Congregation of the Brothers, as hitherto, such devout persons as were converted to God, and were inclined to follow the Common and Apostolic life; so that, in addition to the Canons Regular, men should be admitted of like grace who might follow some secular calling, and others of good character that might be associated with them.

Such was the design which Gerard the Great had in his mind, as he was drawing to the end of his life; having briefly explained his views, he thus addressed Florentius, and the other Brethren that stood around him, and among them was John à Kempis, the brother of Thomas:—‘For this cause I ask you, one and all—and I charge you before God—that after my death ye will construct a monastery such as I have named, and that ye will settle such of the Brothers in it as are willing and have an eager desire to dwell there, and who, with a number of others of like mind, are ready to undertake the execution of it; so that all the devout and religious

everywhere throughout the whole region may dwell securely under the shadow of their wings.' And after a few more words to the same purpose, he ceased speaking. Then the sorrowing and listening Brethren hearing these things had their hope in the Lord revived, and were truly comforted by this kind of discourse; and kneeling down they commended themselves and this especial work to God in prayer.

And because Gerard had earnestly commissioned them respecting the subject of taking upon themselves an Order approved by some of them, they anxiously interrogated him, and inquired, 'Whether he would recommend them to take upon themselves the Order of the *Carthusians*, which they had heard was almost the only one in their part of the world which was reformed.' 'No,' he replied, 'not that Order by any means. Its members, indeed, as holy men should be, are everywhere distinguished for their holy and strict lives, but they are too much withdrawn and separated from mankind. All devout persons should be able to have free access to them, just as it will be always right to have free access to those Brethren of yours. On this they went on to ask him, 'should they take upon themselves the Order of the *Cistercians*, which at that time was, next to the *Carthusians*, eminent for strictness among the Orders.' 'No,' he answered, 'I should not recommend you to take upon yourselves this Order. It is one of considerable severity, and one which not everyone can bear in this our day. But there is another Order, the Order of *Canons Regular*. That is one which subjects itself to a more indulgent rule—one which is fairly suitable to almost all who wish to serve God strictly in the state

to which He has called them. Take that upon yourselves, and the sooner the better, because it does not appear to differ very much from your already devout conversation, except in this point, that its professed members observe under promise and vow, charity, and the three essential obligations of the Order, while you observe these things without any vow. For you, Priests and Clerics, and your Sisters of Béguines, can take none into your Societies who (though they make no solemn promise in the matter) slight the observance of chastity, giving up of their own property (*viz.* poverty), obedience, and, above all, charity, and who will not submit to labouring with their own hands.' And having appointed Florentius as his successor, to have the direction and the chief control in carrying out the founding of his new monastery, as well as to be the general ruler of the Brotherhood; and bidding the Brethren attend to his instructions as they would to his own, that they should highly esteem him, and regard him as a father, he shortly afterwards fell asleep in Jesus.

'And,' continues the historian respecting those to whom the work was intrusted, 'they therefore began, where all ought to begin, by sanctifying their souls beforehand unto God.' And this they did by renewed confession of sin, deep contrition, and a fresh renunciation of the world and all its vanities, so that 'the Eternal Lover, the Bridegroom of the soul, the Lover of purity, might find nothing among them that should offend the eyes of His Divine Majesty.'

The place which they chose for the site of the monastery, as indicated by Gerard, was a waste and uncultivated spot lying between Deventer and Zwolle, and

was afterwards called Windesem or Windesheim. The name was held to be significant of the purpose to which the place had been devoted, for, as Buschius tells us, the name was interpreted to signify 'the Wine of the Eternal God,' and 'the City of Virtues.' A few of the Brethren went forth from Deventer, and were joined by other persons, pious laymen and labourers, and the work was begun in faith, and carried on amid many hardships.

Among the six first Brethren who entered upon the undertaking, was John à Kempis, the elder brother of Thomas. Many friends came forward to help in the work. And besides observing the regular hours of devotion, the Brethren put their own hands to the work of building fresh cells and the chapel, and attending in turn to household duties. Even the first Rector learnt to square and fashion stones for the doors and windows, and use the axe and hatchet for wood requirements. Thus the work proceeded.

Great abstinence was used among the Brethren, and considering that many of them engaged in manual labour, it was carried to excess by a few; and two are especially mentioned who ruined both their minds and bodies, by not taking sufficient bodily support. Whence the Elders found it necessary to moderate their fasting, and made a rule that the Brethren should eat what was needful for their health. It led also to this custom, that when a cleric wished to join them, three things were demanded of him—whether he could eat well, sleep well, and would yield a willing obedience.

Their dress was plain and simple, of dark grey cloth, and fashioned like the other Brothers of Common Life

except that when made Canons Regular they wore a white rochet, and had a black cape or hood thrown over it.

They were the first and foremost in every good work and in promoting an earnest and devout life. Many years, says the Chronicler of Windesheim, did they labour to obtain as correct an edition of the whole Bible as they possibly could. And it is probable that the Bible written by Thomas à Kempis for the use of the Monastery of Mount St Agnes was copied from the edition that they had collated and made. This would doubtless necessitate his frequently visiting the mother Monastery at Windesheim for consecutive portions of it, as he required them. And from the Bible, written out in the large and legible hand which à Kempis here adopted—much larger than that in which he wrote the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*’ in 1441, but similar to that in which he wrote his Missal in 1417—others would not only read for many generations, but copy various portions as they needed, if not make complete copies of it as Thomas had done.

The Brethren also endeavoured to draw souls to Christ by frequent conferences with other earnest minds—when a few anxious inquirers and awakened souls, gathered together, would, after singing a hymn, have a portion of the Gospels, or some other part of Holy Scripture, read to them in the mother-tongue, and familiarly expounded, answering any questions put to them, followed by a short exhortation, a prayer, and more singing. Upon dispersing, the Brethren would frequently give short slips of paper to the people, containing portions of the Bible, or some of the maxims of the saints,

to read in their homes, and exchange with one another.

In addition to this, these Canons Regular did much to further a liberal education among the people in accordance with the views and efforts of their master, of which some mention has been made; they even went beyond him, or rather more fully developed the system which he inaugurated. They not only afforded facilities of education to the labouring class, in opening and supporting schools of rudimentary instruction, but they sought to advance the cause of learning among the better class.

But the finest feature in this religious awakening of the 'New Devotion,' and that which offers the most remarkable contrast to the inanimate and formal piety of their times, was the joyous character of their religion and the fervour of their spirit. This had been strongly insisted upon by Gerard Groote, and the Canons of Windesheim and the other Brethren caught up the tones, as if they were the echoes of the Psalmist, 'O be joyful in the Lord: serve the Lord with gladness.' This joyousness in the service of God and in the doing of His will, repeatedly crops out in the lives which are recounted of the Brothers. And amid the urgency with which Thomas à Kempis insists upon giving up the love of the world and the things of the world, and keeping ourselves in subjection to the will of God, he ever holds out the delight to be found in true religion. Thus to take one instance from his golden treasury of devotion, the 'De Imitatione Christi,' let the reader turn to lib. iii. cap. xxxiv. I, 3.

No wonder that 'the fame of the holy conversation

of these primitive Fathers at Windesheim was noised abroad throughout our whole land,' as the Chronicler of Windesheim has it, 'and was everywhere fruitfully passed on from mouth to mouth, so that the mention of their regular observances, and of their efforts after a most excellent reformation became celebrated, and came to the knowledge of very many. And many flocked thither for the salvation of their souls, seeking counsel, and help; and encouraged by beholding such examples of holy life.

This led to the founding of other monasteries in several places, as offshoots from that of Windesheim. The first of these was that called the Fountain of the Blessed Mary, near Arnheim, which was founded and established in 1392.

The next monastery established was that called 'Novæ Lucis' near Hoern, the founders of which were Gerard de Hoern and Paul de Medenblic, two devout Priests and disciples of Gerard the Great. The third offspring of the monastery of Windesheim was that at Mount St Agnes, which was founded A.D. 1398; and with this we are more immediately concerned, since Thomas à Kempis lived there, and was the Chronicler of the House.

Among the particulars which he gives us of the founding of this new monastery, he tells us that the building was begun at Westerhof, not far off, on a small scale, because the Zwollenses would not suffer them at first to erect it on Mount Nemel. A few cells were simply constructed, a little church built, and then consecrated along with a cemetery by the Bishop. After Easter the General Chapter, assembled at Winde-

sheim, enrolled and incorporated the Canons Regular dwelling here into their religious fellowship.

Various obstacles and unforeseen events, it would seem, prevented the Canons permanently settling at Westerhof. They found that they would here also be subject to much annoyance from their enemies, and that the place was not so healthy as they imagined; for the late epidemic had probably shewn them that it would not be so suitable a place. So after much searching of heart and many consultations, they sought the advice of the Chapter of Windesheim, and after laying the matter before the Archbishop, a change of place for the monastery was decided upon.

The place selected was, what was afterwards called Mount St Agnes, at Nemel, not far from the Brotherhouse, where several of the Brethren lived in pious fellowship, but without taking vows. The people of Zwolle still opposed the building of a reformed monastery here; but the Canons found a good friend in Conrad, the Custodian of Zwolle, who encouraged them in their new undertaking; and they also obtained the license and protection of the Archbishop of Utrecht. The people of the neighbouring town still, however, put obstacles in their way, for when Hubert, the suffragan Bishop, came to consecrate the cemetery for the Canons at Mount St Agnes for the new monastery, they would not suffer him to proceed further than Zwolle; and it was not until the Archbishop of Utrecht returned from Rome, the year after, that the consecration was effected. For not only did he issue a new mandate, but paying no attention to the querulous objections of their adversaries, he himself came in person

to consecrate the place; 'preferring,' as Thomas à Kempis says, 'the honour of God, and the furtherance of religion,' rather than yield to the unjust censures of worldly people, who often set themselves zealously to oppose the works of good men. Moreover, from that time he took the House on the Mount into special favour—giving it his entire protection and advancing its interests. And yet amid his widespread diocese, and the many places he had to visit, he afterwards seems to have forgotten the place, and what had occurred there. For on a certain occasion some while after, when on a visitation, and returning to Zwolle, he asked his attendant priests, while pointing to the buildings on the Mount, 'What is that place, and what kind of men live there?' To which his chief Vicar replied: 'Is the place unknown to our beloved master? The place is your own monastery. That is Mount St Agnes, where the Brethren of the Mount dwell?' 'It is well, it is well,' he replied; 'may God preserve them.'

After these accounts relative to the founding of the monastery, Thomas à Kempis proceeds to give several short memorials of those who died at Mount St Agnes, and other friends around, after the Canons came there.

Previous to the election of the first Prior in Mount St Agnes there had only been a Rector, or temporary governor. After Easter in the year 1398, therefore, the chronicler proceeds to say:—Brother John à Kempis, on being elected Prior, came from the convent of Windesheim to preside over the house in this place. He was the first Prior, and by the help of God he strenuously and religiously governed this settled House, containing a large and poor family, nine years. He also com-

mendably promoted the welfare of the monastery, as much by taking part in the building of it, as in copying such books as were required, and discharging other necessary duties. He built the greater part of the walls of the church, and prepared most of the wood needful for the roof. He undertook the planting of an orchard of fruit trees at the southern part of the monastery, and constructed an arbour of trees. This was the very place which Gerard the Great had some little while ago designed for a garden, where they were to plant their herbs and vegetables, and this had been done, for here formerly fine wheat had been grown. It would appear from what follows that there were several elevated spots round about much higher than are now to be seen in this part. For, continues the chronicler, during his (John à Kempis's) time, mountains and hills were levelled and the low valleys filled up.

Upon this spot he (the Prior) constructed the necessary buildings: a refectory for the Brethren, a refectory for the lay-brothers, a kitchen and buttery, and cells for their guests. A sacristy for the divine things was also constructed between the choir and the chapter-house. We cannot but remark how much this good brother of Thomas à Kempis resembled such men as Felix Neff, and Oberlin, whose lives were so memorable in keeping alive the truth of the Gospel in a dark and persecuting period, by the preaching the Word of God and sowing the seed of divine life in the hearts of those around them, whilst at the same time they were the foremost in undertaking outward labours for the general good, and not ashamed of appearing as workmen among their fellow-men; so did John the Prior and his Brethren

appear among the lay-brethren and workmen with the trowel or the hod in their hands or on their shoulders, or with the spade or the hoe in their hands, when engaged in the fields; moreover the Prior was to be seen among those that laboured in the making of pots from the clay, or digging out the earth and throwing it into the cart. In his leisure hours, however, he occupied himself in reading sacred books, and often engaged in writing and illuminating manuscripts. He wrote many books for the choir and for private use. And, the chronicler adds, because the community were as yet poor, he directed that some of the Brethren should write out these books at a low price, as it had been the custom from early days. On this account many of the Brethren studiously occupied themselves in their cells, whilst the others diligently laboured at various out-door employments.

In writing the chronicles of Mount St Agnes, Thomas à Kempis comes to the time when he records his own entrance into the monastery, which he does in these words: 'Eodem anno ego Thomas Kempis scholaris Daventriensis, ex Dioecesi Coleniensi natus veni Zwollis pro indulgentiis. Deinde processi lætus ad montem Sanctae Agnetis, et feci instantiam pro mansionem in eodem loco.' This passage is important, not merely because it relates to Thomas à Kempis, but thus occurring in the chronicle it is an ample guarantee that Thomas à Kempis was the writer of it. The 'Ego' identifies him with it. He then alludes to the admission of another Brother shortly afterwards, on the feast of St Barbara the Virgin. This was William Henric, a native of Amsterdam, who till this time had been

maintained by the devout clerics at Deventer; so Thomas must have known him, if indeed he had not come from the same House where he had lived whilst there.¹

Shortly after Thomas à Kempis had entered the Monastery of Mount St Agnes, he must have heard the sad tidings of the death of his beloved master and father in Christ, Florentius, and probably he, with a number of other Brethren from the monastery, attended his funeral; but of this we have no clear account.

Another event that occurred about a year and a half, after this, and which leads to a most interesting account of the individual, is the death of Wolfard, one of the first of the Brothers who were instituted, and a priest of the House. The account is thus given by Thomas. "In the year 1401, on the feast of the Martyrs John and Paul,² there died in the monastery of our Order, which is called the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Wood, near Northorn, Brother Wolfard Matthias of Medenblic, a town in Holland. He was tall of stature, quick in his walk, eloquent in discourse, comely in his grey hairs, and constantly aiding the labours of the young men. He also engaged in many lowly deeds, as washing pans and pots in the kitchen, digging the ground, carrying stones and collecting wood. It was his wont to be early in the choir; he was prompt in watching, strong in fasting, diligent in celebrating, and devout in prayers.

"There was at this time of the year a remarkable

¹ *Chronicon Can. Reg. Mt. St Agnes*, ch. viii.

² *I.e.* on June 26. These two martyrs were put to death by Julian because they would not renounce the Christian Faith. A church was afterwards built in Rome to their memory.

pestilence in our monastery of the Blessed Virgin in the Wood. The Prior of that place had been taken ill with it and died, and so had many of the Brethren, and there was only one priest, John Groninghem, left in a most desolate condition with a single novice Brother, Honestus. Our Brother Wolfard, hearing of the deaths that had taken place, and the lonely state of the two remaining Brethren, was greatly moved with compassion for that House. And it came to pass on a certain day, when he was girding himself for labour, he spoke to me (Thomas à Kempis) whilst standing near, in these terms of condolence:—‘O who is worthy to have a portion with the good Brethren of Northorn, and to have such a departure from the world!’ For he was well acquainted with several of them, knowing the place and warmly loving their holy society. Soon after he had spoken many excellent things concerning them, presently Brother Arnold, a *conversus* from Northorn, approached the door of our monastery for the purpose of asking the aid of one of our priests. Brother Wolfard seeing him, came to him, and gladly offered himself for this very object—delighted with the opportunity of going thither. For no sooner had he learnt the reason of Arnold’s coming, than he professed himself ready to go at once with him if it should please the Prior; he therefore sought, and obtained his permission.”

Arnold, rejoiced and moved by his promptitude, said, ‘O how good it is of you, most beloved, to go in this manner!’ The consent of the Brotherhood must, however, first be had. An assembly of them was therefore immediately called, and the matter discussed, as to who should be sent to succour the Brethren at Northorn in

their dire necessity. Brother Wolfard's desire was brought forward, and, though advanced in years, it was seen from his manner that he was wishful to undertake the business out of his exceeding love; and the matter was accordingly thus settled. "And," continues the pious narrator, "rising at the dawn of another day, he went forth with Brother Arnold to Northorn to give his life for the Brethren, after Christ's example, that he might save it in eternity. And bidding farewell to the Brethren, whose eyes were dimmed with tears at his departure, he left Mount St Agnes, never to return thither again, or to see those from whom he had just parted, for he knew not how soon he would be transferred to a higher mount. Thus he overcame nature by relinquishing home and brethren, and fulfilled the law of charity in imitating Christ in His death. For, having entered the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin in the Wood, he himself was shortly afterwards seized with illness and died within a short space, and was buried beside the Brethren of the monastery who had died as aforesaid.

"Brother Egbert related to me," adds Thomas à Kempis, "that a long time ago Gerard the Great had said to our Brother Wolfard, 'You will have two conversions.' And thus it was. For in the time of Gerard he began to have a desire for good things, but after awhile was drawn back again to the world. At length, after many years, he was, by the grace of God, filled with deep compunction, and leaving the care of his farm to others, he changed his earthly life and assumed the habit of the 'religious' with the first Brethren, and closed his last days in a happy struggle."

After a novitiate of some years, Thomas à Kempis is himself received into the Order of Canons Regular; and he briefly records this when giving an account of those who were invested by his brother John, the first Prior, whilst he ruled the monastery. In another chapter attention will be drawn to this important step, and other particulars that follow.

CHAPTER IX.

Thomas à Kempis becomes a Canon Regular—His Vows, and Thanksgiving
—The Three Phases of Spiritual Experience exemplified in his Life.

CONTINUING the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes, Thomas à Kempis says that, whilst this venerable Prior—*i.e.*, John, his brother—lived at Mount St Agnes, there were seven clerical and three lay Brethren invested on the days and years severally written below. He also undertook to ‘profess’ Godefrid de Kempis, who had come from the same town, and had been a very near neighbour. In the year 1401, on the day for the commemoration of the Dispersion of the Apostles, Brother John Drick of the city of Steenwyck, in the diocese of Utrecht, was invested. This man had aforetime been the priest and Vicar of Steenwyck, and was professed on the Nativity of John the Apostle, within a year of his probation, having received the license of his superior the Prior, and was afterward made ‘Procurator.’

In the same year, on the feast of St Brixius, Bishop and Confessor, Brother William Henric, called Coman of Amsterdam, was invested. He was about twenty-three years old. This man before coming here had lived with the devout Brethren at Deventer, and had been sent on hither by Florentius, whilst the latter was still living. He must then have been well known to

Thomas à Kempis, having entered the monastery a short while previous to his doing so. Such notices as these are evidences of how much the common life was happily combined with the monastic in this new movement for a reformation of such Houses. The community at Mount St Agnes more resembled that of a Christian family, where all the members are of one heart and one mind, and live together in holy love and under a religious rule, than the dead and dreary, if not dissolute life, which the monks of those days sometimes led in the monasteries.

In the year 1402, on the vigil of the Nativity of Christ, Brother Gerard Tydemann de Wesep was invested. This man wrote many books for the use of the House, and for sale.

In the year 1403, on the festival of the Martyrs of Pontianus, Conrad, a hoer from the Company of 'Marcha,' was invested.

In the year 1405, on the festival of the Coronation, Brother Alard, a priest, and Brother John Benevolt de Groninghem were instituted.

In the year of our Lord 1406, on the day of the Sacrament, which in that year occurred the day before (or on the vigil of) St Barnabas, two clerics and one lay-brother were invested, viz., Brother Thomas Hemerken, of the city of Kempen, in the diocese of Cologne, own brother of John Kempen, the first Prior, whose father was called John, and his mother Gertrude. Also Brother Octbert Wild, of Zwolle. Also Brother Arnold Droem, a lay-brother from Utrecht, who brought many good things to the monastery, and was the 'Refectorarius.'

This 10th of June, when Thomas à Kempis was invested with the Order of Canon Regular, was a day ever to be remembered by him, and was afterwards always kept with great solemnity and devout thankfulness of soul. With more than ordinary devotion did he observe it, since on these anniversaries he 'renewed the dedication of himself by an earnest and joyful confirmation of his most solemn vow to follow Christ steadfastly till death, and endeavoured by his manner to express his utter contempt of the world, and his thankfulness also, by praises for so special a grace bestowed upon him, glorifying God in the deepest acknowledgment of his own demerits and of the Divine goodness.' He thus makes allusion to this important event in his life at the end of his 'Soliloquy of the Soul.' Addressing God he says:

These things I consider in myself, who, contemptible and useless in this world, have been snatched by Thy holy calling from its shipwreck, and have been found worthy to be united with Thy college also, to serve Thee.

And that I might not go back again, I *freely bound myself with a vow*. And this I attribute not to my merits, but Thy Providence. . . .

Preserve this will, O merciful Lord, and increase the gifts of grace, as long as I am in this visible light.

I know that this calling is a great benefit, which is not given to all, but to those for whom it is prepared of the Father, since it is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy, so that every mouth that speaketh vain things may be stopped, and man be wholly subject unto Thee, and that no flesh may glory in Thy sight, nor claim for itself any of its own merits or good works.

I would here introduce the very form of the vow by which Thomas à Kempis bound himself, and to which

he alludes in the above words, that the reader may perceive the character of it, and more clearly understand with what frame of mind he entered upon the life of a Canon Regular of the St Augustine Order. It is found among his writings, and though it is stern in its requirements and enters into more minute particulars than may be thought needful, there is a fervour and quaintness about it which will repay the perusal of it by those who will view it in a right spirit, according to the word of Christ, who said, 'He who loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me,' and 'So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.'

THE FORM OF HIS RENUNCIATION is as follows:—

O Lord Jesu Christ, my hope, and my sole refuge, the delight of my life, and the guide of my ways, I do this day renounce all things that are in the world for the love of Thee. And this I long to perform to the honour of Thy name. I renounce, in the first place, all my friends, parents, relations and kinsfolk, all that are near and dear, known and familiar to me. Also all cities, towns, castles, castellanies, and country seats, with all mountains and vallies, rivers and fountains, fields, meadows, and woods, should they at any time be mine, or be offered to me: all ornaments, rich household stuff, pleasant and magnificent houses: all psalteries, harps, organs, worldly music, songs, garlands, perfumes: all merriments, clubs, banquets, conversations, visits, salutations, favours, honours, delights, of men: all buffooneries, noises, humours, plays, jests, wanderings, excursions, tumults, useless occupations: all riches, goods, emoluments, properties, charges, offices, dignities, solacements, recreations in the world, and all whatsoever either the flesh can be tempted to, allured and delighted with, or aught by which the spirit may be hindered, molested and defiled.

II. This day, moreover, I make choice of Thee, my God and Protector, as the Governor of my life, the Provider of all things necessary for me, the Comforter in all my sorrows, anguishes and

temptations, as also in all my toils, wherein I am obliged to labour all the days of my life, for the love of Thee, and the salvation of my soul. Thou art my refuge, my home, my city, my habitation : Thou art my food, Thou art my drink, Thou art my rest, Thou art my refection : Thou art my beloved Companion, my intimate Friend, my nearest Relation and Kinsman : Thou art to me Brother and Sister : Thou art Father and Patron, Thou art the Shepherd and Guardian of my whole being, to Whom I faithfully commend myself, with all that is mine, because there is no salvation out of Thee, nor safety of life but with Thee.

May therefore Thy Spirit, O Lord, be upon me, and may Thy grace ever accompany me in all things. May Thine Eye also be upon me by night as well as by day ; and may Thy hand always protect me both in prosperity and adversity. Vouchsafe also to lead me in the straightest way to the house of the habitation of Thy glory, where I may praise and bless Thee for ever, world without end.¹

This vow was made in private between God and his own soul, probably in his cell, after much prayer, fasting and serious thought. His public profession and vow of obedience properly followed after, as the seal and sequence of the dedication of himself to God his Saviour. No one was allowed to be invested in any of the monasteries connected with Windesheim without the sanction of the General Chapter. The ceremony was much as follows. At the time when the investiture took place the candidate was called into the presence of the Prior, surrounded by the rest of the Brethren. And upon his coming, he was first to prostrate himself before them, and was then asked to produce the faculty for his being received into the Order ; which being read aloud, he was interrogated as to whether he would in all things dispose himself to act faithfully as a member of the sacred congregation which he was about to enter. He was then required to sign

¹ *Opera de Thom. a Kemp.* 'Orationes Piæ,' Prima.

with his own hand the deed of his profession, which in Thomas's case was according to the subjoined form :

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

In the year of His birth 1406, and on the day of the Sacrament, I Thomas of Kempen do hereby profess my steadfast resolve and the conversion of my ways, and obedience according to the Rule of St Augustine, before God and the whole Heavenly Court, in the presence of the Reverend Father John, and other Fathers and Brethren of this Congregation of Canons Regular, under the aforesaid Rule. In surety thereof I have hereunto subscribed my own hand with the year and day above written.

They then proceeded with service of the Mass, when the candidate received, according to custom, the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Body, as if to ratify in the most solemn manner the important step he was taking, and to seek grace to enable him to fulfil his sacred profession to which he heartily and voluntarily bound himself. Mass being over, he was to be conducted to the steps of the altar, and with an audible voice he was three times to say, 'Receive me, O Lord, according to Thy loving-kindness; O let me not be disappointed of my expectation.' Then followed certain other ejaculations, or versicles, in which probably all the brethren joined, and the Lord's prayer. After the invocations the new Canon was to proceed to the right corner of the altar, and with a loud voice make the usual oath, after this manner:—

I Brother Thomas do promise, by the help of God, perpetual continence, poverty, and obedience to thee as Prior, and to Thy successors canonically instituted according to the Rule of the Canons Regular, and according to the decrees of the General Chapter.

Having descended the steps of the Altar, the new Canon shall again prostrate himself, and repeat aloud three times these words:—‘Confirm this desire in me, O God.’

Then after a solemn pause for private prayer, upon rising from his knees, he shall receive the kiss of peace from the Prior and from each of the Brethren present in the choir, and then retire to his place in the monastery.

Concerning the state of religious obedience upon which he had solemnly entered, several allusions are to be found in his various writings, in which he frankly commends it, and sets forth its value when rightly observed in that best known and most prized work of his, the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*.’ I would refer the reader to Book I. chaps. ix. and xvii.; and Book III. chap. xiii.

It is only needful to add that an allusion is made to this step in the life of à Kempis in a form of thanksgiving to be found in the 25th chap. of his ‘*Soliloquium Animæ*,’ which he kept by him for his own use to refresh his soul, and was probably so used when he yearly commemorated the event.

There are two kinds of lives, to one of which all men are more or less inclined. The one is the outward life, the other the interior; or, to adopt the language of Scripture, there are those who live and walk after the flesh, and ‘do mind the things of the flesh;’ and there are others who live and walk after the Spirit, and do mind ‘the things of the Spirit.’ The one acts upon the other, and determines the character of the man in a most subtle and mysterious manner; and therefore it is of the utmost moment to choose and resolutely deter-

mine which to follow. And it must be borne in mind that the life of Thomas à Kempis exemplifies in a special degree the interior life—the being *spiritually minded*; heeding what the Spirit of God suggested to him, instead of attending to the solicitations of the flesh. It was a life in which — whilst diligently and faithfully pursuing the duties of his outward calling in life, and the vocation in which he excelled, whilst fulfilling all that was rightfully required of him by others — he paid special attention to the cultivation and development of his spiritual existence, sought above all things to do the will of God from the heart, and to follow a hidden life with God through Christ Jesus. And no account of this saintly character would be complete, or would give anything like an adequate idea of the man, unless our attention was drawn to this, and we could be informed in some definite manner respecting the particular characteristics of his spiritual history — what was the state of his mind, what the trials and struggles of the inner man, what the outpourings and breathings of his soul, and how his faith and love were exercised and drawn out during the earlier part of his devout career at the monastery of Mount St Agnes.

And it is fortunate that for the next twenty or thirty years from this time, we have what may be considered abundant evidence of his pilgrimage and growth in grace, and his advance, through severe probations and searchings of heart, to the stature of a more perfect man in Christ — much more than what there is during the last thirty or forty years of his life; though he seems ever to have lived, to the end of his days, as one to whom an entrance had been given by faith into the

unseen world, and who constantly lived under the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit.

I have already endeavoured to give some instances of this, in the various changes that befel him, and before proceeding with other particulars from the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes, I must direct the reader's attention to other movements in the spiritual life of Thomas à Kempis. For it must not be supposed that from the time when he was received into the Order of Canons Regular he remained in one uniform, settled frame of mind—that he enjoyed an uninterrupted calm and undisturbed peace of soul. It is true that à Kempis was not of those who had fallen deeply into sin and been alienated from God, and had then been converted and had turned to him in earnest for the first time; for from his youth up he had—though with many shortcomings, of which he himself was conscious—constantly sought the favour of God, and endeavoured to walk in His ways; yet did he experience such changes, analogous to what those do who turn to God from a wicked life, though somewhat different; for he turned to Christ again with fresh bonds of love and devotion; he had sought Christ, and tried to follow Him, he had loved Christ, and been attached to Him, but now he had espoused Christ, or rather Christ had espoused him by a personal seal or union, that was never to be set aside. Hence, though he still pursued the same path or direction as before, it was a new step in the devout life, an onward movement of peculiar significance that he had taken. And it is with these various changes to which he was subject during this period of his religious career that I have now to deal.

A few divines of former days, as well as of later times, have noticed and made mention of three phases or conditions of soul, through which spiritual-minded persons are often carried in their progress towards Christian perfection, and in which the wisdom and guidance of Divine grace is discernible, as an education or discipline necessary for fallen man, in moulding him for what God would have him to be, and fitting him for His more immediate presence in glory. It was one of the sayings of Gregory the Great, that 'Every convert had a beginning, a middle, and a perfection; in the first there is sweetness to allure him; in the second bitterness to exercise him; and in the third fulness of perfection to confirm him.' In the first of these stages the soul experiences the joy of its espousal with Christ; the man is made sensible of the Infinite Love bestowed upon him in fuller measure, drawing him closer to Its bosom, enfolding and gladdening him in Its blessed embrace. And this inexpressible sweetness and fervour of soul which pervades the man with holy rapture, and often with an ecstasy of delight, is doubtless designed by the mercy and goodness of God to draw onwards the awakened convert, or one who gives himself to God afresh in some solemn compact, in the path of holiness, to strengthen in him the newly formed resolutions of devotion to God's service, till he has gained some hope and confidence in treading the narrow way of life. This conscious tasting of the Divine favour and loving-kindness is a wonderful help to such souls, since it carries them through the many difficulties, hindrances, and peculiar temptations which

are apt to beset them in their early endeavours to live a new and closer walk with God.

And then when such an one is somewhat established in grace, and feels able to hold his ground against the enemy; nay, often at the time when he thinks that he shall never be moved, but be able to stand fast in the Lord like the strong mountains, another change comes over his soul: the time of trial and probation comes, when all joy and delight in religion seem gone, and the light of God's countenance seems withdrawn; and this comes that he may know himself more thoroughly and intimately, his own weakness and proneness to fall and come short, and his constant need of God's help and presence. To this end he is brought as it were into the wilderness, dreariness surrounds him, and he feels a kind of desolation within himself. This is a season of sore distress, when God for a wise purpose causes him to pass under the rod, that he may be strengthened and exalted by discipline, and being purified, like gold tried in the fire, he may come forth from the Divine ordeal more meet for the Master's service, and more precious in His sight. The man is unable to account for the deep depression of mind that possesses him—the dryness of soul, the fears, and doubts, and perplexities that come upon him; and he feels as if his faith and hope in God were small and vanishing away—as if God were leaving him to himself; and then comes the pleading with God, the hungering after Him, a deep longing for the consciousness of His blessed presence again. During this season of trial, the soul enters into herself, and inquires if there be not some cause for this; and beholding her own vileness in the sight of a holy God, her

own helpless and lost condition, she is led to humble herself before Him, to cast herself entirely on the mercy of the Blessed Saviour, and after many a heart-yearning cry, learns patiently to wait for light and comfort, for pardon and grace. With some this season of trial lasts longer than with others. God alone knows and decrees after what sort the process shall be, and how long it shall last; for the character of souls, and the training for each, necessarily differ much. But in due time, and often imperceptibly, it comes to an end, and the soul gradually recovers its vigour and hope in God, and comes forth more beautified and established in grace than before.

The soul is then entering upon a third and final stage of her history, when a more settled frame, a more heavenly calm, a more abiding peace takes possession of her. There may not be that exuberance of fervour, that ecstatic delight which was once enjoyed, when she first consciously knew God, or when God graciously drew the soul nearer to Himself, and gave it a foretaste of how gracious He is to those who truly seek Him. But there gently steals over the soul a sweet serenity, as it were, of a blessed Sabbath, when God brings the soul into that rest which remaineth for the people of God, and which some do enter into even in this life, though the fulness of the blessing is reserved for the life to come. There is a feeling that the storm is over, that the deep waves that have gone over the soul are left behind; a consciousness in the individual that he has been brought into the haven where he would be, under the defence of the Most High, where he can in future quietly remain at anchor, secure in some degree from

being tossed to and fro by the tempest that will still arise in the world outside. There is a happy recovery in the soul as from sickness; a restoration to new life again, a fresh and more enduring reconciliation with God, that begets an unshaken confidence in Him, and a rejoicing in hope to the end.

Now Thomas à Kempis appears to have passed through these three stages to which I have just drawn attention. Some allusion is made by his biographers to them, and we find sufficient evidence of them in his writings, especially in his 'Soliloquy of the Soul,' that valuable repository where à Kempis records the various emotions and experience of his spiritual history, from which I have already to some extent drawn. Our attention is directly turned to this work, for, alluding to the second of these conditions of his soul, his contemporary biographer says, 'therein,' that is in the 'Soliloquy of the Soul,' 'it may be seen how he sat solitary and kept silence;' and further on, 'because he was acceptable unto God and found favour in His sight, therefore it was necessary that he should be proved by many temptations, exercises, and humiliations; that he might afterwards know how to help others in the like state, and to prescribe them such a remedy, as he had often experienced in himself and in others. And this accordingly he did, both in his oral discourses and in his written treatises.'¹ I shall therefore again refer to this work for examples of what I have advanced respecting the threefold experience which à Kempis had.

In considering then, the first experience of the soul, his words will unfold to us more clearly what he him-

¹ *Opera Thom. a Kemp.* Nuremb. edit. 1494, fol. lxxxvii.

self experienced in the rapturous devotion which at one time and another overflowed his soul; and there is much instruction regarding the interior life to be gathered from them. Thus we may notice how à Kempis breaks forth in fervent tones, sometimes speaking *of* Jesus, sometimes speaking *to* Him:—

Thou art beautiful, my Beloved, and exceedingly lovely; not to the flesh, but to the mind; not to the eye nor to any of the senses, but to the believing soul, that hath a pure heart, and hath transferred her affections to things invisible and spiritual.

Whosoever would be united to Thee by devout affections then, must of necessity mortify all carnal desires in himself, and above all things strictly preserve purity of conscience. For it is displeasing to Thee, if anyone goes to the creatures in quest of consolation.

On this account Thou callest me to love Thee in the inner man, and directest me that I should wait for Thee; because then I shall find Thee, as often as I despise myself; and whatsoever Thou willest that will I will.

And this will be for my entire good, that I may freely worship Thee, and freely serve Thee; not fearing to lose anything, making no terms with love, because Thou delightest in the soul that loves Thee purely.

Oh, that I might be wholly united to Thee in such a union, in life and in death! But I often go far away from Thee in other ways, in loving perishing things, and not seeking the end which it becomes me to do.

Oh, how kind, how sweet Thou art, to them that love Thee! how pleasant to them that taste Thee! They who have experienced Thy sweetness know from hence to think and speak better of it; for Thy sweetness passes all sweetness, and sweetens every bitterness.

I must omit several passages that had been selected, and can only give one more where addressing the Blessed Saviour in simple yet touching words that well

up spontaneously from his heart, as if overflowing with the fervour of the Divine love, Thomas cries out:—

Gladly do I follow Thee, O Beloved Jesus, while on earth, but much more gladly would I follow Thee to Heaven: for where my Treasure is, there will my heart be also.

Thou art my Treasure, dearer than every creature, Thou Who art at the right hand of God. For me Thou becamest Incarnate, for me Thou hast been exalted.

Thou hast left me an example on earth; Thou keepest Thyself as my reward in Heaven. To Thee, then, mine eyes are lifted up, after Thee all my steps shall go.

Draw me, then, that I may begin to run fervently after Thee. I need drawing, yea much drawing. For unless Thou drawest, no one comes, no one follows, because every one turneth to himself.

If Thou drawest, behold I come; behold I hasten, I run, I am in a fervour. But if not, I neither run, nor do I seek, scarcely do I desire to follow. But if Thou givest me Thy hand, I run the more quickly the more strongly Thou drawest.

It is the voice of my Beloved that draws me, and says, ‘And when I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.’¹ O good Jesus, draw me after Thee; and not I only, but all of us who run after the odour of Thy ointments. . . .

Oh! sweet society with Christ, and under the wings of Christ. Oh! gracious intimacy, full of love, and of the sweetness of the Holy Ghost, which is better felt than described.

This belongs to the soul, which has weaned itself from all worldly things, which no love of the present life holds captive, but which in the secret of her mind is carried upwards.

I need not give other examples of his happy frame of mind at this time, as reference is made to it afterwards several times. This season of fervour in which the light of God’s countenance seemed to shine upon à Kempis continued for some time; how long we know

¹ St John xii. 32.

not, nor is it needful to determine, but by degrees it is observable that a change came over him, his soul became oppressed, the sky above him seemed to gather darkness, and the light that cheered him to depart. And to this new phase of his spiritual history I must now revert.

It is easy and pleasant to serve God and engage in religious exercises when it goes well with the soul, and it experiences a sweet fervour and delight; but it is a sore trial when it is otherwise; many fall away at such times; and yet our trust in God, our still serving Him, our waiting upon Him, and submitting ourselves to His afflictive dispensation, all this is the more pleasing to Him and more acceptable than the enjoyment of rapturous feelings, and manifests more clearly the nobleness and steadfastness of our faith, because of the struggle and endurance. Never did the excellency of Job's religion shine more brightly, never did He glorify God more than when in the depth of his woe, he could exclaim, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' Never was the faith of Abraham more manifest and more acceptable to God than when against hope he believed in hope, and when called upon to offer up his son Isaac was ready to obey, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; and well was he called the Father of the Faithful. And so with à Kempis in this saddest and most grievous season of his spiritual experience; never did he more clearly manifest his trust in God and glorify Him than at this time. This darkest passage of his life proved to be the most salutary and most glorious, and wrought in him, through Divine grace, much good, making him more dear to God.

In the best known of his works there are some traces and allusions to his having passed through this period of sore trial; but from what he says in another treatise we shall learn more fully how deeply he felt it, and how piously he bore himself under it. And as in the days when he enjoyed the bright sunshine of God's presence some clouds would flit across his soul, so here, amidst the darkness that hovered over him, gleams of hope would occasionally break in.

An anecdote is related in the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' which is supposed by Vallart to have reference to an occurrence which happened to Thomas à Kempis during this time when he was visited with severe depression of soul. It is as follows:—

When a certain person was in anxiety of mind, often wavering between hope and fear, did one day, on his being oppressed with grief, prostrate himself in prayer before an altar in the church, and said within himself, 'O if I could but know that I should still persevere!' all at once he heard a voice within him from God which said, 'If thou didst know this, what wouldst thou do? Do now what thou wouldst then resolve to do, and thou shalt be secure enough.'

And immediately being comforted and strengthened, he committed himself to the Divine Will, and his anxious disquietude ceased.

Neither had he the mind to search curiously any farther to know what would befall him in the future, but studied rather to ascertain what was the acceptable and perfect will of God, for the beginning and accomplishing of every good work.¹

There are other passages in this work, which sufficiently show that he had passed through some great spiritual conflict. Let the reader refer to the third book

¹ Lib. i. ch. xxv. sec. 2.

of the 'Imitatione,' ch. xiv., and again to the xxixth ch. of the same book.

It may be well also to mention here that there is an entire book written by à Kempis containing the sighs of a penitent soul, in a treatise 'On True Compunction of the Heart,' which is evidently the fruit and outcome of his own experience at those times when his heart was overwhelmed within him. I shall not stay, however, to give any extracts from it, as I purpose to give some account of this crisis in his soul's history, as it would appear to have been given by him with its various phases and struggles in his 'Soliloquy of the Soul.'

He had been speaking of the days when it was well with him, and God had made him glad with the light of His countenance, when suddenly a wave of thought brought to his remembrance the days of anguish and darkness of soul that once came over him, when he could find little or no pleasure and comfort in religious services. It is worth while to notice the transition as it is recorded in his own words.

Joyfully would I be present when it is well with the devout soul ; and that is when it is with Jesus at noon-day.

It fares ill and is sickly when Jesus is absent, and the odours of His grace cease to flow ; when Holy Scripture delights not ; when it is wearisome to be instant in prayer and meditation :

When the clouds of the heart thicken, and evil thoughts so prevail that they can scarce be checked, and strive to overthrow all former good.

And then he begins the story as to how his soul was troubled, how he mourned in his prayers, and sought for deliverance. It reminds us to some extent of a similar crisis through which the Psalmist passed,

when he tells us how his heart was disquieted within him—how fearfulness and trembling had come upon him, and an horrible dread had overwhelmed him. Thomas à Kempis, pleading with God, cries out:—

O Lord God, why doest Thou thus? What strange sport is this? Oh! good Jesus, what meanest Thou by this? Were it not displeasing to Thee, I would hear further intercourse between Thee and Thy beloved.

Since in all her wishes she seeks Thy gracious presence with which to be caressed with pure delights, I wonder why Thou allowest her sometimes to remain desolate. Thou passest by, and withdrawest, as if she had not sought Thee.

But she moaneth and is solitary; for that is her voice which seems to say, ‘My soul hath longed for Thee in the night season.’ It is night to her when Thou, the true Light, art not present.

Therefore she prays for Thy presence, lest the darkness of sin seize hold upon her. Many are the troubles that she feels, when the grace of Thy visitation is withdrawn from her.

For unless she were under some suffering, she would not so longingly have cried after Thee. She hath cried out, and another hath also, in words which have been before spoken, ‘My soul hangeth upon Thee.’

But I think no trouble can be so grievous, or seem so grievous, as this, that Thy presence should be wanting.

And after more words of a like import, he reverently asks:—

Wherefore, then, dost Thou sometimes so secretly withdraw Thyself from the soul when she is not aware of it? Dost Thou love her or not? If Thou lovest her, why, my Beloved, dost Thou fly away?

If Thou lovest her not, why didst Thou visit her aforetime? And if now Thou lovest her not, why dost Thou return again, and knock at the door and enter in?

Surely Thou art not using any fickleness in thus entering in and going away? Far be it from Thee! But such constant

changes are no light matter to her : yea, no small disquietude springs therefrom.

And, perchance, her complaint would have been less, if Thou wert openly to say to her, 'I go away, and come again, and thy heart shall rejoice, and thy joy no man shall take from thee.'

But now Thou speakest no precious word to her, and she only remembers that passage of which she experiences the truth, that 'Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the Temple.'

From the interrogative passages found in this portion of his spiritual history, it would appear that Thomas à Kempis, in this season of desolation and darkness of soul, had gone to take counsel with some more experienced Christian friend ; or it may be that he had laid the matter before two or three other devout souls that met together in conference to speak on holy subjects, for there are indications sometimes that more than two persons were speaking. Thomas has put down the words that they might be useful to other souls in like distress ; and I shall give a few passages, in which he opens out his grief, as he relates to others the story of his distress. Speaking of Christ, he continues :—

I have sought Him, saith the soul, but I cannot find Him ; I have called unto Him, but He gave me no answer. Therefore my soul slept for heaviness.

And I said, This is the voice of the turtle when she hath lost her mate. It is not to-day as it was yesterday and in days gone by, when thou sangest songs of joy.

The morning passed away, and the evening came ; but the Bridegroom lieth down at noon-day, and it is not allowed me to approach Him.

Thy words express sadness, and thine eyes are wet with tears. Thou art in grief, O soul, and hast need of consolation. But tell me how it arises ?

It is not gold or silver that I seek for myself, or anything in the world ; it is not loss or gain, nor is it injury or penury that affect me, for as regards these things, I am dead to the world and crucified.

If I know thee well, thou hast long ago renounced all that is in the world ; but I ask, hast thou also perfectly learnt self-abnegation in all things, and hast thou attained to the contempt of thyself?

This is the goal of very few, but it is especially required of thee. Whence then arises thy grief? What hast thou lost?

If it is touching thy Beloved, I know that not without a cause sorrow hath filled thy heart, and nothing can be joyous unto thee till He return, and restore to thee the light of His countenance.

But how in the mean time dost thou keep up, O delicate soul, that leanest upon the Beloved? For it is evident to me, that He is not always present when He is wished for.

When therefore He is absent, wherein dost thou quiet thyself? Tell thy secrets to me, although they be full of grief. None, but he who loves not, will doubt that thou grieveest for Christ's absence.

At present thou art very sad, but it is for Christ, the Bridegroom, it is not for this world ; and I know that when He shall return thou shalt again be comforted, since He will not be forgetful of thee for ever. For he has said, 'I will not leave you comfortless. I go away and will come again to you.'

In calling to mind, during this season of sadness, the happy hours he once enjoyed with Jesus in the freshness of his first love, he reminds us of the experience of many of God's saints, who in their disconsolate state, speak of the blessedness they formerly possessed in the 'soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His Word.'

The absence of the Beloved shows me what His presence conferred. I was glad and rejoiced in Him, and was little apprehensive of His speedy departure.

He came skipping on the mountains ; joyous and pleasant appeared He at the gates of my house : and immediately the doors

of the flesh were closed, and I brought in the Beloved to me, and I sat with Him, and rested under His shadow, safe from the storm and tempest.

Then was I glad when I beheld my Beloved. Why should I not rejoice? He is the joy, the exultation of my heart. Ah! what I had then, what did I possess in that hour.

It is not possible for me to tell thee, how well it was with me; nor is it expedient indeed that I should now tell thee. When He Whom alone I loved was present, nothing more could I desire.

Oh! how much I loved Him, when I neglected myself, and all things else. I cared little or nothing for all that could charm me, because His love ravished me altogether, and whatsoever concerned Him not, seemed incongruous and insipid.

When He was taken away my heart was almost clean gone from me. For my soul hung upon His grace, because I had no other comfort besides Him, Whose absence I lamented.

He was sufficient for me, and was enough for every kind of gladness. What I desired, such He was. And whatever He enjoined me to do, I gladly accepted, and gave myself wholly and promptly to Him.

The following words mark the beginning of another interview or colloquy which Thomas à Kempis had with some devout souls:—

Here I am again then, seeking to inquire of thee, what thou in the mean time doest when thy Beloved at any time leaveth thee without internal consolation? What dost thou advise also on such an occasion? And by what means can He be reconciled or called back?

I entreat thee, O dearest and devout spouse of Christ, keep none of these things secret from me, which I have come to question thee about. Thou canst by this means do me a service, by imparting to me what thou piously thinkest.

From thy words, I can measure the weight of my own grief, and whether I sorrow justly or unjustly. For I have seen thee at times cheerful, and at other times very sorrowful, and then again I

have beheld thee rejoicing, and from thee I have in some measure considered my own case.

But I reckon that the cause of this change most chiefly arises from the withdrawal and the return of thy only Beloved ; in which case, knowing that thou hast suffered many things, I have come to be instructed.

And she (that soul) said, In yielding to thy wishes, I will endeavour to state openly what things were transacted within me ; whether it be when I am with the Beloved, or when I remain alone, as one that is weaned, expecting Him Whom my soul loveth.

Truly this thou shouldst know first, that in proportion to the joy and sweetness which His grace confers upon me, even so great is the grief and bitterness which His absence causes.

In the passages which follow, we have further intimations as to how God dealt with the sorrowful soul, past experiences are named, and a *confession of grace*, as it were, was made, in which Thomas narrates various ways in which Jesus had been the best of friends to him. The whole forms an interesting disclosure of his inner life. We then come upon a portion wherein he explains to us why the soul is brought into trouble and often feels cast down. Thus in continuing an account of his spiritual history, he says :—

From that time when I first began to love Him, I have also wished to persevere with Him. Which when I had so resolved, this very thing was so pleasing to Him that He confirmed it, saying, ‘He that remaineth in Me, and I in Him, bringeth forth much fruit.’

But that it might be proved how true, how strong, how chaste, the power of love was, it was needful that temptation should disclose it. But I could not be tempted, unless He permitted it, and withdrew Himself for a season.

And because temptation is wont to be very helpful to the purifying of the inner man, and to the abundant fructification of

virtues, as well as to the clearer perception of spiritual gifts, it took hold upon me, and began to try me.

How mightily and how frequently it tossed me hither and thither, my God and my Lord, from whom no secret is hid, very well knoweth : Who is a witness of all things which are carried on in my heart. And until now He beholdeth me, and considereth me to be nothing more than a frail creature.

Unless therefore He had assisted me, when I was so anxiously weighed down, so that I scarcely believed that I could live, my soul had well-nigh dwelt in hell, as if I had already fallen into the pit of despair.

But He had mercy on me, Who is wont to be present with such as are troubled in heart. For who was strong enough to endure so many temptations unless God had protected and succoured him?

Of His mercy it was that I was able to stand before the face of the storm. And it comes from the gift of His goodness that I know that I still stand. Hence I ought not to put any trust in myself so long as I am in the flesh.

Then he speaks further of God's dealings with him under trial, and the effect it had in some measure upon him :—

O how great was His mercy towards me, for even when I was ignorant of it, or did not heed it, He was with me in the trial ! For many times hath He preserved me, that I might not be delivered over to my passions.

But sometimes of His hidden judgment it came to pass that I should fall, and be overcome even in small things, lest peradventure I should become proud and be presumptuous in great ones ; so that being humbled and confounded, I might learn that I was nothing, even when I seemed to stand well and flourished most.

I advise thee, therefore, that thou shouldst not rashly or hastily praise me, although I go prosperously forward, but rather reserve thy praise for a holy end ; and then praise not me, but the Lord.

Let the glorious God alone, Who hath many times stood by me in my temptations, be praised.

For often when I was led captive by them, He mercifully set me free. And sometimes when they were coming against me as a whirlwind to carry me away, He sent forth His arrows and scattered them, He multiplied His lightnings and confounded them.

Again for a time they departed from me. Yet He would not that I should be altogether without them, because He has rarely granted this to any of His saints in this life.

After this, therefore, I enjoyed a little rest, my Beloved bestowing peace [upon me; which having nevertheless obtained, I did not give myself to bodily or worldly ease; but I turned my mind, that so I might behold the earth from afar, and look a little into the secret things of heaven.

I then designed with myself also, to see what kind of person I was, and by what means I could better please Him, Who had shown me so many tokens of love, so vastly exceeding my deserts.

For it was not in the whirlwind of temptation that I was able to see how sweet my Beloved was, but in serenity of mind and in the quiet of solitude.

And, as far as in me lay, I did desire this serenity of peace without intermission; that I might more perfectly cleave to Him, and wait upon Him, without any hindrance or trouble.

But the effect of grace does not always follow according to the desire of the soul. Yet sometimes the desired sweetness is granted, sometimes it is very rightly delayed.

The lights and shades of the interior life appear in the many changes of trial and ease, sorrow and gladness, the consciousness of the presence or absence of the Beloved; and an attentive reader will readily perceive many fine touches and affecting moments in the soul's history of this renowned but humble-minded saint, whilst I would observe that a third phase of spiritual experience is now entered upon, wherein the soul attains a

more settled and perfect frame. I shall give, therefore, a few more selected portions in which à Kempis speaks of his inner experience, and then turn to some of the annals of the monastery, which he records:—

Moreover, it is no small privilege that I am permitted to address Him (the Beloved) on any occasion whatever, because He has so often freely anticipated me with His gracious visitations.

Furthermore, when He draws nigh, and is minded to keep holy day with me, immediately a light shines in my heart, before the brightness of which the dark vapour of all vain thoughts is driven away, and the long wished for serenity is possessed.

For at His entering nothing that is shameful or indecent can remain, because He is the Lover and Engrafter of purity. Moreover every illusion of the devil with all the pomps of the world must depart forthwith.

When, therefore, my passions and the temptations which I had endured were thus subdued, I began to recognise Him more clearly, and to love Him more fervently: I endeavoured likewise to give Him hearty thanks, that now, at length, He has vouchsafed to keep from me the commotion of sins.

For they were often wont to break in upon my peace, and strove to shut my mouth, so that I could not speak to my Beloved.

But fruitless were their endeavours against His power and wisdom, Who in the midst of any commotion can glide into my heart, and silently infuse into me His secrets, so that I can count all their whisperings as nothing, and do not inwardly attend to them.

Then he breaks forth into this fervent prayer, which seems to come from a full heart:—

O my Beloved, most dear, most beautiful, take me, I implore Thee, so to Thyself, as often as Thou shalt see my affections pressed down by any weight of sin, or held back by any useless occupation, so that I may not begin to wander away further from

Thee after crowds of evil thoughts, and thereby be suddenly deprived of Thy grace, without which I shall not be able to continue in Thy most excellent friendship. For Thou art my Lord, and my God, Who healest and hallowest all things by thy Word ; Who hast appointed my soul for life, and hast not suffered my feet to be moved, but hast delivered me from the evil hour, and hast extricated me from the snares of death.

O how many have been forsaken, and have perished, who were more innocent than I ! Bless, then, the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Whatsoever Thou sayest, or thinkest, or offerest in praise, all is far too little, and comes exceedingly short. For greater is He than all praise, and sweeter than all melody. Therefore my soul cleaveth unto Thee, and loveth Thee over and above all Thy gifts, though beautiful and sweet is every thing that Thou hast out of charity bestowed upon me. For Thou alone art the Bridegroom ; the rest are presents and tokens of Thy love. I will not love them instead of Thee, nor will I believe that all things can suffice me without Thee, lest peradventure I lose at once both Thee and them. Thou permittest me to use many things for Thy sake, but Thou wouldest not that I should enjoy any of these things instead of Thee.

Therefore, my Beloved Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, I have preferred Thee to all, and have striven to love Thee beyond all else. Grant me, then, happily to enjoy thee, and in fruitful union with Thee I may be made happy for ever together with Thee.¹

As if he had been lost to all things else whilst lifting up his soul to his blessed Saviour, he now again recollects himself, and, as it were, apologises for thus delaying his discourse ; for he says, ‘ But, pardon me, my friend. For the love of my chief and only Friend hath some little carried me away ; and would to God it would raise me up still more, and lift thee up also on

¹ *Soliloquium Animæ*, ch. xvi. sec. 8.

high in like manner. Let Him prepare us for a heavenly ascent; but let us keep a humble descent.' He then again proceeds to speak of himself, as if in answer to an inquiry of his friend:—

Thou askest, if I am sometimes left by the Beloved. I answer, Yes!

And then the friend, whom he has as it were permitted to learn the secrets of his inner life, puts the further question to him, 'What doest thou meanwhile?' And then Thomas tells him in these words:—

I sustain myself with as much equanimity as I possibly can, and so I wait till He comes again. I am weighed down in nature, but in spirit I am inwardly upheld; otherwise my grief would be inconsolable.

Then I remember, that there is no living in love without some grief. I live by faith, I believe the Holy Scriptures, and I assent to their consoling words. And though for the present it may be bad with me, I do not doubt, neither ought I to doubt, but that it will yet become better.

True and faithful are those things which are narrated in the sayings of the Saints; for they were exercised and proved in many such like ways: Nature ever wishes to be relieved, and seeks to be comforted somehow. But the spirit, nevertheless, is ready to endure all things, whatsoever God would have me to suffer.

If then I should sometimes be indevout and sluggish in the performance of good works, yet is my wound not without a remedy.

'Though He slay me,' saith the righteous, 'yet will I trust in Him.' If I love virtues, patience is a great virtue; let it now therefore be in some measure preserved.

For the difficulty of a work frequently increases the lustre of the virtue; but that the virtue may be proved, and be made brighter and brighter, it is generally tried by contraries.

When such a trial, then, comes upon thee do not doubt, neither

be cast down, but preserve thy patience, and commend the righteousness of God.

God is not so severe and unmerciful that He should suffer thee to remain long disconsolate. Only take heed that thou do not grieve immoderately, and that thou murmur not against the righteous and Holy One, because thou art left.

Lest the evil spirit assail thee with bitter temptations to despair and blasphemy, and being too fearful, thou be more tormented by them, than it behoveth thee to be.

Therefore bear thyself up a little while, and suppress thy grief, whatever be the heaviness of mind or pain of body that is forced upon thee.

Continue firm in the good resolution, which thou hadst determined to keep from the beginning. For it is especially helpful in such a crisis to cast all thy hope on the Beloved.

Patiently wait for heavenly consolation, and thou shalt soon receive more abundant grace, and experience the favour of God. Behold thou hast a faithful witness, saying, 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me.'¹

Thomas à Kempis, moreover, relates how he had sought the presence of Christ, the Beloved, and opened his grief to Him, and inquired why he was thus left disconsolate; and then we are told of the Heavenly counsel borne in upon his soul, which he received as words spoken to him by Christ Himself, most precious and instructive to the believing soul. Here are some of them :—

The Beloved spake also to the loving soul, saying, 'I will hide my face from her for a little while; I will leave her for a moment, that I may see whether she purely loves Me.

'It is a great matter to love purely, for this is to love Me, not on account of herself, nor for any temporal advantage or spiritual comfort; but to love ME only, for My own sake, and finally herself on account of Me, and not for anything that she hopes to obtain from Me.

¹ Ps. xl. i.

‘It does not appertain to all thus to love Me; but this prerogative of pure love is solely the property of a most perfect soul.

‘But that soul which is as yet imperfect, hath need to be frequently proved and aroused, that she may know how much she loves, and if she hath yet learned to despise herself.

‘For thou saidst in thine heart, “I love indeed.” And frequently didst thou repeat the same, “I love.” But I believe not in words or thoughts only. Therefore in the truth thereof will I prove thee.

‘When I am present and speak fair to thee; when I bestow devotion, or increase the gift; when all is prosperous and for the most part I am pleasant to thee, then thou devoutly sayest, “My Beloved, I love Thee.”

‘And thou sayest well: for I am very lovely; and all things that can be said or thought of Me are lovely and sweet, and for ever praiseworthy.

‘But what great thing is this, to love and praise Me only for kindnesses? For even sinners do this. They often truly bless Me when they receive what they desire unrighteously. But praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner.

‘Whosoever then loves Me for the sake of a benefit or consolation, what does he more than the covetous? Advance, advance, and ascend to greater perfection.

‘Be ashamed to be always weak and effeminate: learn to eat solid food, and not to be fed any longer on the milk for little children. Pass over to the number of the mighty men of David, of them that take hold of the spear, the sword, and the shield.

‘Take up thy cross, and follow Me. Make haste to be reckoned among those who know how to bear divers troubles and many kinds of exile for My sake.

‘Thou art bent too much on comfort. Therefore I will prove thee, and incline to the other side, that thou mayest know what thou canst suffer, lest thou seem to thyself innocent and holy.’

After speaking of various trials the Christian is subject to, the Saviour then continues:—

And after this I will come, and thou shalt be restored to the

former grace. For I would not have thee faint altogether, since I love him that loveth Me.

And if thou dost not yet love perfectly, still I do not despise the little one ; but will take care that thou growest. My care for thee is that thou mayest do well, I would not therefore that thou have any hesitation concerning Me.

I know indeed how much thou art able to bear ; and therefore do I temper My visitation, that thou mayest be able to endure when tempted, and not fail.

If, however, I shall make some delay, wait for Me till the day of visitation ; I will indeed come and make good My promise.

But do thou pay attention to prayer, be diligent in sacred reading, and in all things hold fast patience and longsuffering.

For I am not ignorant, that during my absence thou art in grief ; but it is certainly not pleasing to Me that thou art so soon cast down, and givest up all hope, as if I should not return.

Where is thy faith? Great faith thou hast especially need of in this state ; because although thou seest Me not, thou art seen by Me, to Whom thou shouldst commit thyself and all that thou hast.

Here is another portion of the Divine counsel, which is well worthy of being treasured up. A Kempis was again waiting on the Divine presence to hearken what the Lord God would say unto him ; and after one or two questions and replies, these words come to his soul, as spoken by Christ :—

Return therefore unto Me, saith my Beloved. It is enough that thou hast until now run about hither and thither. Learn to be steadfast and meek, hoping and trusting in Me, not only in the day of visitation, but more abundantly in the night of temptation.

I left thee, that, being wearied, thou mightest the more quickly return to Me ; and being disappointed in thy outward consolations, thou mightest understand how great a blessing My love which so often invited thee, hath conferred upon thee.

Consider, therefore, now — for it is not without a reason —

wherefore thou art sometimes left, that thou remainest without affection, that thou art afflicted with weariness :

That thou art oppressed with temptations, that thou art cast about hither and thither ; that thou findest no counsel, neither feelest any help, but sufferest straitness and want on every side.

I leave thee, then, that thou mayest know that My presence is necessary to thee ; not only in one thing, or even so much in great matters, but truly in every action, in every place, and time ; in the morning as well as in the evening, and wherever thou art, or goest, or stayest.

Thus indeed shalt thou be instructed to walk more carefully with thy Beloved ; to abstain from vanities, and to beware of giving offence.

I leave thee that thou mightest know how much thou lovest Me ; that is, that the measure of thy love may be seen.

Thou didst esteem thyself to be stronger and more blessed than thou really wast ; but it became evidently clear, that when My help was taken from thee for a little while thou wast poor and miserable.

After what manner could thy love be made known, unless it were when thou shouldst bear heavy afflictions with meekness ?

Sometimes I see thee lukewarm ; but that thou mayest be stirred up to fervour, and diligence in seeking Me, I conceal Myself for an hour, as a lover standing behind the wall.

I see, and I know all things ; but exercise is profitable for many things, and often gives greater insight. Moreover, if thou lovest Me, thou wilt not delay to seek Me. If I please thee thou wilt seek for me more eagerly.

Knowest thou not that riches gotten with labour, are held fast with greater eagerness ? To whom is rest so desirable, as to the weary traveller ? To whom is love so pleasant, as to the lover who has previously endured grief ?

And a treasure that is regained, is it not twice as dear as it was before ? A double joy and abundant gladness return, because the presence of the Beloved has been intermitted.

For thy profit, then, I withdraw myself ; and I do this not because of any displeasure, but for a certain gracious dispensation do I sport with them that love Me.

Let this suffice for the present, because thou art worthy to hear this much.

But I give thee leave to return to Me, as often as thou feelest it to be needful. I have never shut up My bowels of compassion against those that humbly and earnestly supplicate Me.

From this time, it would appear, that à Kempis gradually regained his composure and peace of soul; the crisis was passed, 'his heart is established and will not shrink.' Come days of darkness, come torrents of afflictions, he will still hold fast by God, and trust in His love and mercy. Though still walking humbly with God, this trust grows continually into a settled conviction with him, and in due time the fruit appears, in a life-long devotion to his God and Saviour.

CHAPTER X.

The Chronicles of Mount St Agnes by à Kempis—He enters the Priesthood—His Account of John Cele—Writes the first books of 'The Imitation'—His Visit to Windesheim.

THOMAS A KEMPIS was in his twenty-sixth year when he made his profession and was fully admitted into the Order of Canons Regular; and if we take the events of the next eight years it will bring us to the time when he was ordained priest, and had begun to compose the first books of his most celebrated work, the 'De Imitatione Christi.'

The chief matters of importance which had transpired in the Monastery of Mount St Agnes after Thomas à Kempis had been made a Canon Regular, were the resignation of the first Prior, his brother John, and the election of his successor. I have already noticed what was recorded concerning John à Kempis; and now after giving a reason wherefore he was called away from Mount St Agnes, the Chronicler proceeds to tell us something concerning the person selected to fill his place, together with some account of what the second Prior did whilst he continued with them.

John à Kempis had been early recognised in the Brotherhood as having a special faculty for organization and for infusing an earnest spirit of hearty obedience, order, affection, and self-denial among those with whom

he was associated. He had been a favourite disciple of their founder, and had become thoroughly imbued with his design in projecting the establishment of those institutions for the furtherance of a higher Christian life; so that they might not only be exemplary models for existing monasteries, but also be the means of drawing up to a higher level of godly living, numbers of people in the world around them. In the year 1408 he was therefore invited, and sent by the Chapter of Windesheim—from whence the chief direction of the whole community issued—to begin a new monastery, with a few persons willing to join him, at a place near Bommel, a city on the Rhine in North Brabant, but so close to the border that it looks over into Gelderland.

After he had departed, the Brethren at Mount St Agnes looked about them for another fitting person to take his place. Thomas was much interested in the matter; and it was one well considered by the Brethren dwelling there. Whether at the suggestion of those who had promoted Prior John to another post, or on the application of the Brethren of the Monastery of Mount St Agnes to the Chapter of Windesheim, a Brother from the latter House was chosen to be the second Prior. He was called Brother William Vorniken, and was elected on the Sunday previous to the day for commemorating the Ascension of our Blessed Lord. For seventeen years he presided over their monastery, and Thomas à Kempis speaks of him as ‘a lover of poverty and discipline.’ ‘Afterwards,’ says à Kempis, ‘he was taken from our House and made Prelate of the superior House of Windesheim, and became the Father General of our whole Order.’

Thomas, who was well aware of what this Prior did, and how he lived and was serviceable to the Monastery at Mount St Agnes, tells us that he caused the pulpit in the church to be erected, and had new and fitting seats made for the choir. He also procured beautifully ornamented vestments for the priests and other ministers, to be worn on the Sundays and Festivals of the Church. He enlarged the boundaries of the monastery; he built a new house for the husbandmen, and folds near at hand for the flocks; he planted divers sorts of trees, and among them those bearing fruit, in many places in the grounds belonging to the community; the rougher portions moreover of the mountain, which for the most part had been as yet untouched, he planted, and reduced the sandy tracts to service. He decorated the sacrarium with pictures, wrote books for the choir and good copies for practising; he also illuminated many books. Yet in all these things poverty and simplicity were as a friend to him. Out of love he received many laymen, that they might live, or sojourn for a time, in the monastery, so that, as Thomas has it, they might, by persevering faithfully in holy living, and by bringing themselves under subjection in the community, become worthy to receive the reward of eternal life. From several of these he received gifts for the monastery; and to certain of them he gave the habit of the lay brethren.¹ During the period that he continued Prior at Mount St Agnes he invested fourteen clerical Brethren. The names of them are given, with the dates of their investiture and certain particulars respecting each. I need not, however, give them here, lest the recital become tedious, for there is

¹ *Conversi.*

to some extent a similarity in them to those I have already mentioned ; let it suffice that most of these Brethren came from the neighbourhood of Zwolle and Campen.

There is, however, a great charm in these simple annals of the religious Fraternity to which Thomas à Kempis belonged ; and, as we proceed, I shall continue to select such matters as appear to have any special interest. Besides keeping a chronicle of what immediately concerned the Monastery at Mount St Agnes, he had, as I have intimated, another book in which he recorded other events of interest respecting 'the Brothers of Common Life' in general. Therein we observe how he notes, that after the death of Amilius, the successor of Florentius at Deventer, John Haerlem succeeded in the government of the House, where he had formerly lived. And the recording of this shews that he still felt a deep interest in what happened to the Brethren there, though he was now separated from them.

In the year 1408, some little time after Thomas had been made a Canon Regular, the first House or Convent for the Sisters (*sanctimonialium*) of their Order was established and opened at Dieppenheim, a little to the south-east of Deventer.

In the year 1409 the Monastery of Budiken was transferred to 'the Brothers of Common Life.' William de Monte, 'electus Padebornensis,' desiring to reform this House, converted it from the Rule of the Canons Secular to that of the Canons Regular.

In this same year, in the neighbouring town of Zwolle, Gerard Kalker, a devout priest, and first Rector of the House of 'the Brothers of Common Life,' died. 'He

was tall of stature, of an innocent life, sweet in discourse, and of a sagacious disposition. He was collected in manner, kind to the poor, affable to strangers, beloved by the citizens, and fervently animated to gain the souls of many by Divine love. He was an active imitator of Florentius, whom he much honoured, and loved with intimate affection as a much-beloved Father. He also left behind him many devout Brethren whom he had instructed in the acquiring some of the highest virtues.'

Thomas also here gives us a short memorial of another of the Brethren who died at Zwolle the year after Kalker; and from this account and others it is pretty certain that those living at Mount St Agnes must have kept up an intimate acquaintance with the Brethren and other devout people living at Zwolle, and that they must have been mutually benefited and cheered by this interchange of godly fellowship. Thomas had doubtless often listened to his voice, and with others was edified by his fervent counsel. The name of this individual was Henry de Goud or Good, a devout priest and confessor to the sisters at Zwolle, one of the old disciples of Florentius. And being powerful in the Holy Scriptures, he was reckoned a great preacher, and a true despiser of the world and its riches; not fearing to condemn the vices of sinners. He showed great concern for the salvation of his neighbours by having frequent discourse (*sermocinatione*) with them; he became a very faithful guide of the individual conscience, and the guardian of a good name and humble life. Sometimes when he came to Mount St Agnes he would desire to speak to the Brethren separately in their cells.

During this same year (1410) death had also entered

the Monastery of Mount St Agnes. A young Brother named Nicolas Kreyenschot, who had been but lately invested by the Prior Vorniken on the Feast of St Michael, was called to his rest at the going down of the sun, on the Feast of St Barnabas, at the age of twenty-three. He was of a good disposition, Thomas informs us, and through God mercifully working in him, he fulfilled many years in a brief space of time, and escaped a longer wrestling with this present world. The virtue of obedience shone in him most conspicuously, for if anyone said to him, 'Come, Brother,' did he not come, and did he not come immediately, or 'Go,' and did he not go at once? On one occasion he prepared a sharp rod for himself, and came to the Superior and said, 'I implore thee, father, for God's sake that thou wouldst severely chastise me; for I so frequently transgress, and do not advance in anything.'

The next important event of moment which occurred here was one of great interest, and had been anxiously looked for. Many years had the church on the Mount taken in building, and many of the Brethren had assisted in the work; and now, on April 8, 1412, which was the Friday after the Paschal Octave, Thomas says, 'our church was consecrated in honour of St Agnes the virgin and martyr of Christ, by Matthias Buduanen, suffragan Bishop of Utrecht.' Many priests and other religious persons were present, and among them they had the Prior of Windesheim, the Prior of Belheim, Master Conrad Hengel, and John Haerlem, priest of Zwolle. And with them a large company of both sexes, of all conditions, young and old, from the towns and villages about, were gathered together to this dedication.

There was much rejoicing on the occasion among all the people, and a general invitation to the feast was given to all strangers that attended. The statutes of the monastery were accordingly relaxed for that day. When the consecration of the church had been solemnly performed, the chief Pastor proceeded, wearing the mitre, to consecrate the four altars. In the afternoon, attended by the Brethren of the Congregation, the Bishop went outside the doors of the church to consecrate a new cemetery, on the west and north sides, for the burial of the dead.

In this same year Thomas records that about the same time 'the venerable Fathers of the Canons Regular from Brabant attended our General Chapter at Windesheim, and were received, with the Brethren under them, into communion, and numbered with our fraternity.' He notes also, that 'at the Feast of Pentecost, in this same year and thenceforward, all the canonical "hours" of the monastery were sung in our church.'

Referring to the other chronicle which Thomas kept, we find mention made of the death of a friend of his, an excellent priest named Wormbold, who died at Utrecht on the vigil of St Barnabas Day, 1413 A.D. He was confessor of the Sisters of the third order at St Cæcilia in Utrecht. Thomas speaks of Him as a burning and shining light, who kindled new life in the hearts of many of his hearers by the word preached, and who led them in the paths of a better life by his good example and salutary counsel. He was a studious lover of the Divine Scriptures, and eloquent in his discourse to the people. On account of the eminent purity of his life, he was greatly beloved and honoured by a large number of people. He wrote many books on theology;

and translated many sayings of the saints into the German tongue for the use of the faithful laity, who anxiously desired to know more of God's will. At length, having laboured piously and most successfully in God's service, he drew to his end. The day before his death, our blessed Lord most benignly vouchsafed to this man the sweetest consolation, by visibly manifesting Himself to him in a certain vision. His last words in departing out of this world were, 'Since Thou only, O Lord, hast established me in hope.' His body was reverently interred in the choir of the Church of St Cæcilia.

Thomas à Kempis had now been nearly fourteen years in the Monastery of Mount St Agnes; six of these had been passed in his novitiate, and about eight as Canon Regular. And if we may judge from what is written, he seems to have regained greater serenity of mind, and to have had his faith and hope in God more fully established, so that he could look back upon the season of spiritual distress, through which he had passed, as one of profit, and as a way through which God had been leading him to the attainment of higher degrees in grace, and to a more abiding attachment to Himself. He appears to have come to a more clear understanding of the manner in which God oftentimes deals with souls who are seeking to live more nearly with Him, and whom He would lead on to the more perfect life in Christ: and so it was doubtless that à Kempis came to be better fitted and able to speak to others about the welfare of their souls, when they sought him in like seasons of darkness and disquietude. From the time he made his vow there would seem to have been no

looking back; he had put his hand to the plough, and he would steadily persevere; hence he made greater advance in grace, and in the knowledge and love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and to use the words of the Apostle, he pressed forwards towards the mark and prize of his high calling.

The contemporary biographer — whose account of Thomas à Kempis, though very brief, is generally to be depended upon — having just spoken of his investiture and the salutary effect of his soul's conflict, afterwards says: 'This Thomas quickly made great proficiency in Christian virtues, every day making some progress; still advancing in the way he had now entered upon; still adding fervour to fervour, devotion to devotion, virtue to virtue, so that all were struck with admiration at the exceeding ardour of the devout life which appeared in him. And because he was very humble, therefore was he accounted worthy of God to receive from Him very great and singular favour and grace, as plainly appears from what he himself has expressed concerning it.'¹ Here again the biographer of his day refers us to the writings of à Kempis, that we may learn more particularly what happened in his inner life.

We come now to another important step in his life. In the year 1414 Thomas à Kempis, when about thirty-four years old, was ordained Priest. He does not make any special record of it, though in his writings he several times alludes to the fact of his being a priest; and to the high importance and responsibility of the office in his estimation. In the fourth book of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' when speaking of the dignity of the

¹ Opera et libri vitæ fratris Thom. de Kemp. Nuremb. 1494, fol. lxxxv.

Holy Sacrament, and the reverence which is due towards it, he thus refers to the priesthood, and plainly intimates that he himself was numbered in the holy order:—

Take heed to thyself, and see what this ministry is, which has been committed to thee by the laying on of the hands of the Bishop!

Behold *thou hast been made a priest, and consecrated to celebrate the Sacrament!* see now that thou faithfully and devoutly offer this Sacrifice to God in due time, and that thou behave thyself so as to be unblamable.

Thou hast not lightened thy burden, for thou art now bound by a stricter bond of discipline, and art under an obligation to lead a higher life of sanctity.

The priest ought to be adorned with all virtues, and afford to others the example of a good life.

His conversation should not be in accordance with the common and ordinary ways of men, but with that of the Angels in heaven, or that of perfect men on earth.

The priest arrayed in the sacred vestments is Christ's representative, to pray humbly and suppliantly to God for himself and all the people.

Further on in the book the author makes some additional observations in the same high tone of spirituality; but I shall only select this earnest prayer:—

Let Thy grace assist us, O Almighty God, that *we who have* undertaken the priestly office, may be enabled to serve Thee worthily and devoutly, in all purity and good conscience.

And if we cannot live in so great innocency as we ought, still grant us, at least, duly to weep for the sins we have committed; and in the spirit of humility, and with the full purpose of a good will, we may be enabled to serve Thee more fervently for the time to come.

The year after he was ordained he began to write his first Missal, and finished it in the year 1417. There

need be no question about this, as the author has in his possession a facsimile of a portion of it, with Thomas à Kempis's name which he subscribes to the work, with the date when it was finished. It is written in a large bold hand, and so well formed are the letters and words that it appears very much like the printed pages of the earliest printed books, when the letters were not altogether well formed.

About this time Thomas lost another dear friend and spiritual adviser; this was none other than John Cele, the celebrated Schoolmaster in the neighbouring town of Zwolle. Historical accounts of the method and state of education at this time are very rare, and therefore all the more valuable; it may therefore help us to gain some idea of it, and of the scholastic discipline to which Thomas submitted, and with which he himself was afterwards associated, if I here relate what Buschius, the Chronicler of Windesheim, says respecting his old master at Zwolle and the school over which he presided.

After stating that John Cele had been educated at the University of Prague, and had been appointed 'Rector Scholarium' of the school at Zwolle in 1376 by the sheriff who was the patron, he goes on to say that the scholars numbered from eight hundred to a thousand, and were usually divided into eight classes; that Cele had two under-masters to assist him, and that some of these pupils were from the highest rank in the country. The school was a preparatory one for the university. Cele had received the degree of master of arts, and if not ordained to the priesthood, must have received some authority also to give public instruction in the church. He was the conductor of the choir, like Boheme of

Deventer, and led the singing when his choristers sang at the early service, high mass, and vespers on Sundays and saints' days. The rest of the scholars he placed opposite to him, on the east side of the choir; and after the early service on Sundays and saints' days, he expounded the Epistle for the day, robed in his academical gown; and after the high mass had been celebrated, the appointed Gospel. At the conclusion of the afternoon service he delivered a lecture out of some learned book, and then dictated to his scholars some extracts from the writings of the Fathers. Above all things he impressed upon his pupils the necessity of their leading a pure and godly life. Any neglect of his instructions which was unrepented of, was punished not by payment of money, as formerly was the custom, but by stripes. Those young people whose dislike of moral purity led them into sin, were compelled to lie down on the floor of their class-room to be flogged with reeds, which chastisement the whole class had to take part in inflicting. Runaway scholars were not received back again by Cele, and those that were incorrigible, or found out in stealing anything, were expelled.¹

As Thomas afterwards lived in the neighbourhood of Zwolle—within three miles of it—he himself became intimately acquainted with Cele, and had frequent opportunities of conversing with him. Having been a friend, and for a while the companion, of Gerard Groote, and associated with him in promoting a godly reformation, Thomas à Kempis, after he left Deventer, regarded Cele as a link with the past; and from him he probably gained many of the particulars which he relates respect-

¹ *Chronicles of Windesheim*, pp. 603-609.

ing the founder of that Brotherhood, which had so kindly received him into its bosom. For seventeen years this intimacy with Cele lasted, and Thomas looked up to him with almost filial affection. Some time before Cele's death the fame of Thomas began to be spread abroad, and several of Cele's older scholars, we are informed, were in the habit of coming to Mount St Agnes to see Thomas, to be instructed by him in godly wisdom. As might be expected, Thomas gives us a further account of this excellent man. It is on the occasion of his death, and he thus speaks of him:—

In the year 1417 on the 9th May there died at Zwolle the Reverend John Cele, the zealous Rector of the Schools, the best instructor of youths, the most fervent lover of the Divine Name, and a pains-taking observer and preceptor of Church music in all the sacred offices. This excellent man, renowned for the holiness of his life, governed the schools a long time with great ability, and trained many of his scholars to be lovers of religion and of Divine worship. For among his scholars several of them attained to eminence in the religious life, and acquired honourable and important positions—some of them being made Fathers and Rectors in the Church. For, remarks Thomas, the disciples being subject to a good master were taught to despise the fleeting glories of the world for Christ's sake, and were led to see that there was nothing better for them in this life, nor any holier entrance into the ocean of Immortality, than to fight for the Lord of Heaven by abhorring the allurements of the world. It was a pleasant thing, then, in his days to go into the city of Zwolle, and behold the select multitude of scholars that frequented the place. Who can worthily narrate with what paternal solicitude he endeavoured to instruct all who came; leading them to embrace the principles and habits of an honourable life, for the sake of a good name? To this end, therefore, he frequently expounded the Holy Scriptures to them, impressing upon them its authority, and stirring them up to diligence in writing out the sayings of the Saints. Moreover, he taught them

to sing accurately, sedulously to attend church, to honour God's ministers, to love religion, to converse with the devout and learned, to pray often, and willingly to engage in Divine praises. Always when present he ruled the whole choir joyfully with subdued accents of sweet concord; and often on the high festivals he played on the organ with great exultation, thus becoming a thorough imitator of holy King David, who danced before the ark of God with great gladness.

This joy in holy praise is frequently alluded to as manifested in the behaviour of those connected with the 'Modern Devotion.' They seemed to enter into most of their sacred exercises with the enthusiasm of the blessed Mary, when she exclaimed, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.' For the praises of God in their mouths seemed delightful to them. Thomas à Kempis continues his account of Cele by saying:—

The rich were able to pay their expenses, but the poor that gathered round him had frequently to ask for help by begging; so he often became the father of the needy when asked for God's sake to assist them; instructing them willingly and gratuitously, whilst he exhorted them to turn their studies to the glory of God. But he would not admit or patiently endure the unsettled and forward; but either by correction changed them into better youths, or he expelled them from his presence, lest the perversity of their insolence might be detrimental to the establishing of what was good. He was therefore a rod of fear to the dissolute, but a staff of protection and health to well-disposed learners.

The fame of his virtues was spread to the remotest corners of Germany; and his precepts were repeated in all parts of the world by the lips of his scholars. Amongst them were to be found natives of Brabant, Holland, Trèves, Utrecht, and Liege; as well as youths from Gelderland and Cleves. Such numbers of talented men were educated at Zwolle, that the great city of Paris was aware of the excellency of this school; holy Cologne was obliged to acknowledge

it ; the learning of Erfurth has proclaimed it ; and even the holy Father himself was informed of its worth.

He gathered together for himself many learned books, especially books of divinity, which he caused to be distributed after his death, —some to churches, some to monasteries, and others to the poor among the faithful as gifts for the regulating of their souls. This reverend and truly commendable John Cele was a native of Zwolle, honourably educated, learned but not inflated with knowledge, temperate, chaste, humble, and devout. On one occasion, constrained by the motion of a pious desire, he went with his friend the venerable Gerard the Great, to visit the most religious John Ruysbroek, renowned for his excellent life and doctrine, in the region of Brabant, to see this most beloved man of God face to face, whom he had known long before by common report. They were both, continues Thomas, paternally received by him ; and being much refreshed by many things they heard from his mouth, and by his earnest example, they returned after a few days' sojourn with him to their own place. And [from this time there was kindled in the hearts of both an intense flame of brotherly affection.

And certainly John Cele entertained a wonderful regard for Gerard from the very commencement of his preaching, and always had the heart of this dear man united to himself in Christ, since he held forth the Word of God bravely among the people, being himself unto them an example of life, and having an eager longing for their souls. On which account when he was evil spoken of, John Cele bore the weight of the opprobrium of men, who are never in want of some grievous indictment against a matter of well-doing. He encouraged and extolled the glorious work and words of the preacher ; and did not on account of the detractions of the envious cease from lauding so excellent a man, but frankly spoke out for him and for the devout men under him, before the magistrates and the people. Gerard also sent to this man several affectionate letters, the words of which show plainly the intimate love which existed between them. The whole number of his epistles Cele collected together, and had copied, for the sake of reading. Often also would he mention, in glowing terms, the name and deeds of the venerable Master Gerard as being the best ex-

ample for himself that he could mention. This is the end of John Cele, a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, to whom God gave the heavenly fruition of eternal glory with all His saints. His body was buried in the Church of Windesheim.¹

This short memoir gives but a sample of a most important and beneficial work carried on by the Brethren in the instruction of youth, during Thomas's days. It was, as has been said, the chief means by which they helped to train up a new generation.

It was shortly after à Kempis entered the priesthood also, it is estimated, that he began to compose the first books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' It is said that about the year 1410 there appeared abroad certain short treatises of devout meditations, which were attributed to him, and which were much read and esteemed. This may be the reason why Sphanhemensis speaks of Thomas à Kempis as 'flourishing' in the year 1410. His name, it is said, was not attached to them as he was far from being ambitious of honour in the world, or seeking to acquire reputation in the Church by what he had written. But however much he endeavoured to conceal himself, the name of the author became known, especially among the members of the Brotherhood, and through them to others, so that unconsciously as it were, and without his seeking, he became eminent, and men began to look to him for further instruction in the way of righteousness, and to learn through his words what God had revealed to them in His written Word. Thomas à Kempis emin-

¹ From the Chronicle of Brother Thomas à Kempis concerning those things not immediately connected with the Monastery of Mount St Agnes, which is to be found at the end of the Chronicle of the said Mount St Agnes.

ently became a minister of the Gospel, not so much at first it may be in the way of preaching to the people—though this came afterwards in some measure—as in unfolding to the minds of men, and enforcing upon them, through his writings, how they might truly obey the Word of God, and become real followers of Christ, their Lord and Saviour.

It was this that induced and incited him, doubtless, when he had been made priest to give his utmost attention to produce something of pre-eminent worth—to put forth all the powers of his soul and mind so as to give of the best he had to God's service; to bring out of his treasures which he had carefully gathered the choicest gems of sacred learning, to polish them afresh, to add to them from his own experience in religion, and set them in order, so that they might take hold of those who heard or read them, and convert them to the obedience of Christ. He was one of those of whom it may be truly said, he did not bring of that which did cost him nothing, but he brought pure oil, well beaten, as an offering to the Lord, for the use of the sanctuary, to cause the lamp of truth to burn brightly, and therewith to guide souls into the way of peace. He sought not to produce learned or subtile treatises on Divine subjects, but studied to write what was plain and simple, so that the humblest child of God might understand, and that, according to the words of the prophet, he that runs—however busy a life he may be leading—may read the Divine precepts. He was nevertheless one of the thinkers of his time who loved his fellow-men, and who in the silence and solitude of his chamber sought out suitable words that he

might win them to a better life, and make them more truly sons of God and heirs of eternal life.

It was this that led at length to the production of his choicest work which now forms the book called the 'De Imitatione Christi.' Though he still fulfilled his daily task of copying manuscripts to assist in supplying the wants of the monastery, yet, as he could not be thus employed during all the hours of the day, and would often have his mind free to range and dwell on any subject that much engaged his attention, it is pleasing to remember that his thoughts and spare moments during this period of his ministry were mainly occupied and given to the composition of his inestimable work. Tolensis, who was a Brother in the Monastery of St Agnes after the death of Thomas à Kempis, tells us that it was a customary thing for him while in bed during the night to compose, and to write books after morning 'lauds,' thereby depriving himself of his natural rest, and injuring his bodily health, for which he deserves well of all those who cultivate piety.¹ And when we consider how clearly ideas and thoughts spring up in our minds, and present themselves to us in fitting and most forcible words whilst we sometimes lie awake on our beds; how even matters that have perplexed us, and about which we have been anxious and uncertain during the day time, have been wonderfully solved by us in the night season; and how a plain way, or the right words to say, have been presented to us, we have not much difficulty in picturing to ourselves how it was with à Kempis in the production of his great work—how greatly his soul was possessed with

¹ Francisc. Tolensis, *Vita Thom. à Kemp.*, sec. 10.

the desire of producing words that might be of real value to the saving health of his beloved Brethren, and to all others who earnestly sought to live righteously and godly in this present evil world. We can imagine him awaking in the night with this idea pressing upon him, how he would devoutly ponder over solemn subjects that would come up before him—perhaps, at first, some of the words of Holy Scripture or of holy worship, which he had lately listened to, or written out, the precious counsels of his pious Brethren, or the Fathers of the fraternity from whom he had learnt so much, or some of the sayings of ancient sages, with which his mind was well stored, especially those of Pythagoras and Seneca—and then how the sacred wisdom, distilled into his mind, as it were from on high—for he was ever seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit in all he wrote—would shape itself in terse and epigrammatic sentences, and be conveyed in simple, few, yet weighty words. And then in the early morning, after he had paid his homage to the Most High, how he would at once put down on paper whilst still fresh in his mind the well thought-out passages, or counsels of Christian perfection, which had been conceived within him. Little by little would these sentences increase—for it must be remembered that his composition was not rapid, since he put down nothing but what had been well pondered over and matured in his soul—and then gathering these scattered and occasional pieces together, he would eventually weave them with admirable skill into one or other of the short devout treatises for which he was so famous.

The composition of the books of the 'De Imitatione

Christi' would not, however, extend over more than nine or ten years, for we have ample evidence that three of them at least were completed by the year 1425, if not a year or two before. I must, however, recount some of the events which happened in the meantime, and are recorded by à Kempis. This will bring us to the narrative in which mention is made for the first time of the books of the 'Imitation.'

The first matter that I notice during this period is, the account which à Kempis gives of the death of one of his pious friends at a distance, with a short memorial of his character. This was Gisbert Dou, or Dove, the Rector and Confessor of the Sisters in Amsterdam, who died in the year 1420, on the day of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. We are told that he was a priest of venerable life, and had been the promoter and founder of two of the Reformed Monasteries of the Canons Regular. This man of God had from the beginning of his conversion been very closely connected with Gerard the Great, and had become one of his most intimate friends. For he was better acquainted with the secrets of Gerard's life than the rest of mankind; since he was his confessor, and the most faithful repository of those things which arose from the unburdening of his conscience. Hence he held with Gerard the most devout intercourse, often having conferences with him respecting the condition of the Brothers and Sisters, and concerning the preservation of the New Devotion, as it was called, which had been commenced in several places. And owing to the abundant goodness of God he lived in excellent health many years for the consolation of good men. Frequently did he preach the Word of God

to the people; and was a kind and generous entertainer of all who came to him. He was a faithful helper of the poor, a sweet consoler of those in trouble, and a thorough friend of the 'religious.' He was held in great esteem by the powerful, and was listened to with reverence by the learned and the Prelates (the Presidents or Priors of the monasteries). And having completed the seventy-fifth year of his life, he died in a good old age, and was buried with the Fathers, among the saintly Sisters of the Order.

We have also the record of another intimate friend of à Kempis, to whom he says he has already referred in his *Chronicles*, who died the same year (1420), in the month of September, on the night of St Ægidius, Abbot. This was 'our beloved Father John Ummen, the first of the founders of the Monastery at Mount St Agnes.' He became a devout and faithful servant of Christ, a favourite disciple of Gerard the Great, and constantly went to hear him preach when opportunity offered. From a certain infirmity in his youth, by God's will he was afflicted with obscurity of vision, and eventually became blind, and remained so to the end of his life. Yet, as Thomas has it, by Divine grace he was so much the more clearly illuminated inwardly, in proportion to his being unable to see outward things. His mother had dedicated him to God, and often journeyed to long distances with her son for the sake of visiting the places sacred to the memory of Saints, leading him by the hand all the way, taking him with her to hear sermons in churches, and inducing him to seek after every good thing. When however the venerable Master Gerard came to preach, and many individuals through the in-

spiration of God were pricked to the heart, the Lord also opened and inflamed the heart of this man to be His servant, and he sought further instruction from this excellent preacher. From this time he gave up his pilgrimages to the shrines of the Saints, and studied to serve God in all tranquillity of soul, exhorting all who came to him, that, despising all earthly desires, they should lay hold of the new life in Christ, and live holily, as Master Gerard taught them.

Therefore, associating himself with certain other individuals of good desires, he began in Zwolle to live with them the common life. Afterwards, indeed, wishing to dwell beyond the tumult of the world, they began to inhabit Mount Nemel, which is now Mount St Agnes. Here he greatly enlarged the congregation which he governed with faithful devotion until the foundation of the monastery was laid—not being daunted by the many obstacles thrown in his way. When at length the monastery was begun, and the Prior canonically instituted, this man, full of brotherly love, and guided by an enlarged ardour of soul, undertook with certain of the older lay Brethren to found a new congregation near Vollenhoven, to the praise of the Holy Trinity; and by the favour of God it was productive of large increase.

Here also in process of time, when the Brethren had multiplied, he, with several others, took upon him the habit of the third Order; and thus this humble Brother remained their president and first Rector to the end of his life. Through the spiritual intercourse which he held with Master Gerard he learnt the art of a holy conversation, and by his advice and direction fully sub-

mitted to his new way of living. This Father John was a true 'devotee' and worthy to be remembered; for in the earlier days of his conversion he daily made advances towards perfection and attained to maturity in the Divine favour. He was an eminent lover of holy poverty, a guardian of humility, a friend of sobriety, an ornament of modesty, a pattern of simplicity, a staunch upholder of discipline, an enemy of vice, a luminary of virtue, an example of devotion, and being strong in faith, persevering in hope, and diffusive in charity, he converted many people from the vanity of the world.

He grew feeble in old age, especially as he drew near to the time of his dissolution, and became sick unto death whilst ruling over the Sisters of Almel. And having consummated his seventy-fifth year, he fell asleep in the Lord, and was buried in the same place, in the chapel of the Sisters.

Thomas à Kempis then notifies that in the following year (1421) a disastrous plague broke out in Deventer, Zwolle, Campen, and the neighbouring towns, which happened in the three summer months, and cut off a great number of people from the earth. And further on he tells us, that in the month of September in this same year, whilst the grievous pestilence still prevailed, several of the fraternity were attacked by the disease. We have an account of several of them, and they form short memorials of real saints with whom Thomas was well acquainted, but interesting as they are, we must pass over most of them.

It is to be observed that à Kempis notes down several important events that happened about this time in the country where they dwelt, which shows that he

was far from being unconcerned about the welfare of the people of the land. Thus he tells us that in the year 1422, during the days of Pentecost, peace was confirmed between the inhabitants of Utrecht, Holland, and Gelderland. And that this was the cause of much rejoicing, because for many years they had exhibited great enmity towards each other, which led to sad scenes of plunder, slaughter, and fire.

In the year 1423 there was so severe a cold and frost during the winter, that a great mass of frozen ice covered the low lands. This lasted to the month of March, when the snow and ice suddenly melted, and there followed a great inundation of water, which rushed impetuously over the plain, and much seed being thereby immersed perished in the waters. In the summer of this year, continues à Kempis, the boundary wall of our monastery was finished from the east side to the west, and new gates put up.

In the year 1424, on the first Sunday after St Andrew's day, the venerable Father John von Huesden, the second Prior of Windesheim, died. He was a disciple of Gerard and Florentius, and governed that monastery by the grace of God thirty-three years. He was profitable to the whole Order, and was a most benign and consolatory Father to all the devout Brothers and Sisters throughout the entire diocese, holding all in common charity; he was an ardent lover of the Scriptures, and wrote out many books for his monastery; his favourite divine was the Father St Augustine, of whose works he procured a copy with great perseverance. He along with John Wale, the venerable Prior of Zwolle, was summoned to attend the

General Council of the Church held at Constance, where they were kindly and reverently received by the Cardinals and other prelates. Thomas à Kempis appears to have had a remarkable presentiment or revelation of his death a little while previous to its taking place. There is some interest attached to the notice of it as it took place during a visit which à Kempis made to the Windesheim monastery; and I shall therefore give his account of it.

It happened that a few days before the Prior died, after the octave of St Martin, Bishop, that two Brothers of Mount St Agnes went to Windesheim, for the purpose of consulting the Prior. And on that occasion one of them—which was Thomas himself, though he keeps himself as usual as much hidden as possible—whilst sleeping there the same night, had a singular presage of the future. For he saw in the heavens an assembling together of spirits, as if they were hastening to the death of some one. And immediately he heard in his sleep a sound on the table, as if he were called to the departure of one dying, that he might be aroused to keep watch. Rising, therefore, from his bed, he was desirous to go and ascertain what this might be, but he could perceive no one: for it was before five o'clock in the morning, and the Brethren were all yet resting quietly. Returning, he silently began to think within himself, that peradventure our Father, the Prior, would in a short time take his departure to heaven. Still he related to none in that House anything concerning the vision; but to one cleric that had come from Brabant he said privately whilst going with him in the way, 'Say to Master Hermann Scutken, who has been de-

layed in Thenis, that if he desires to speak to our Father at Windesheim he must come quickly, because I judge that he will not live a long time, if the vision be true that a certain person saw this night.' Fifteen days after these things had happened the Reverend Father died, soon after high mass had been performed. Mass for the dead was chaunted for him in the monastery, and his body was buried in the choir before the steps of the sanctuary.

I cannot let this account pass without making one or two observations respecting the object of Thomas à Kempis's visit to the Prior of Windesheim. It may have been the occasion when the General Chapter of the Canons Regular which assembled every year was held at this mother House of the Brotherhood; and when Thomas, with another Brother, who had been selected by the Brethren at Mount St Agnes, had come to attend it, as their representatives. And there seems to be some probability that this might have been the case, since we hear of a Brother from Brabant being there also. Or, it might have been that Thomas à Kempis and the other Brother from Mount St Agnes had come to consult the Superior of the Order about some matter relative to their own House; and why is it that Thomas is sent, when as yet he does not appear to have held any official post in the monastery? He was certainly shortly after this made Sub-prior, as we shall see, but not yet. And one or two things suggest themselves as likely to have been talked over with the Superior. First, whether Thomas should not be selected and urged to accept some post of usefulness in the monastery, whereby his ability and influence might

prove of more value to the Brethren. Or, secondly, it might have reference to matters concerning the depositing of some three or four of the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi' in the mother House with the approval of the Prior. I am led to this conjecture because a copy of them, written out by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, was left there about this very time, as seems pretty certain from the following testimony.

There is extant in the Royal Library at Brussels, numbered 15,137, a manuscript copy of the three first books of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' bearing the date 1425. It is not written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, but it has this important attestation, evidently authenticating the copy written by him, at the time when the copy was taken from it; it runs thus:—

Notandum quod iste tractatus editus est a probo et egregio viro magistro Thoma de Monte-Stæ Agnetis et Canonico Regulari in Trajecto, Thomas de Kempis dictus, descriptus ex manu auctoris in Trajecto, anno 1425, in sociatu provincialatus.

Which has been thus rendered:—'Let it be observed that this Treatise has been composed by a pious and learned man, Master Thomas of Mount St Agnes, and Canon Regular of Utrecht, called Thomas à Kempis. It has been *copied from the manuscript of the author* in (the diocese of) Utrecht, in the year 1425, and in the Society's House of the Provincialate.' This is only one out of the many and various kinds of testimony in support of Thomas à Kempis being the true author of the 'De Imitatione Christi;' yet it alone, when all the circumstances are taken into account connected with it, ought to convince reasonable men that he indeed composed the work.

In the year 1775 the Abbé de Ghesquière wrote a book about this (1425) manuscript. But a hundred years before this Hesurus wrote about it in his 'Hecatombe,' and states that, one David Ehinger, of Kirchheim, asseverated these three things concerning this MS. of the three books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' *First*, that the name of the author, which it bears written upon it, is Thomas à Kempis, Canon Regular in the Diocese of Utrecht. *Secondly*, that this copy (of 'De Im. Ch.') was transcribed from the autograph of Thomas à Kempis himself. And *lastly*, that it bore the date of the year of our Lord 1425.

Now this is conclusive evidence that a copy of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, was deposited in the Provincialate House of the Canons Regular at Windesheim, about the time we name; and when we bear in mind the date of Thomas à Kempis's visit, the year before, it seems very probable that it was deposited there by Thomas à Kempis himself, at the desire, or at least with the approbation, of the Superior of his Order. For it should be remembered that the above assertion of David Ehinger was given and written down before the heat of the controversy about the authorship of the book came on; and that the said book was acknowledged to be the work of Thomas à Kempis; before that dissension began, it was known, valued, and commented upon as his.

There is a curious story told about this manuscript (called the Kirchheim MS.), which is related elsewhere, and to which, along with a specimen of the writing

of the MS., I must refer those of our readers who are interested in such matters.¹

It should here be noticed, that in this same year, 1425, Thomas à Kempis began another important labour that occupied him no less than fifteen years. One work is no sooner accomplished than another is undertaken by him. And this was nothing less than the writing out of the whole Bible in Latin in a fair large hand. I have already alluded in one or two other places to this blessed work, which extended to four folio volumes; and what I have additionally to observe is this, that another object of his visit to the Prior of Windesheim might be, and probably was, to procure the loan of the best amended edition of the Holy Scriptures; for one of the chief employments of the more learned of the Brethren at this mother House of the Order from the beginning had been to collate the various manuscripts of the Bible, and settle, as far as their judgment served them, what was the correct text to use. In this arduous undertaking they had done a great work in their day and generation, endeavouring as far as in them lay to give to the world at large, no less than to their religious Brethren, the revealed will of God contained in the Bible in as clear a light and in as correct a version as it was possible for them to do. It will be remembered that in the lives of Gerard, Florentius, and other Fathers of the Common Life that were learned, great pains had been taken to procure good manuscripts of the Bible, and that they had pressed forward the work

¹ Ghesquière *Dissertation sur l'Auteur de 'l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ.'* A Verceil, 1775. See the *Authorship of the 'De Imit. Christi.'*, pp. 269-280; Rivingtons, 1877.

of revisal as a matter of singular importance. And now Thomas à Kempis, one of the best of the caligraphists, was about to write out a capital copy of the whole Bible, for the use of the Brethren of the Monastery of Mount St Agnes; not only for their own reading, but that other Brethren might copy it out also, or portions of it, for their own use and for distribution. For permission to have the successive parts of this Bible, to make his copy from, may very likely have been one of the objects of his visit to Windesheim on the occasion when he had the vision. Be this as it might, it seems very probable that the getting the several portions of the Bible to copy would necessitate visits to Windesheim from time to time.

I must now return to the account of the history of things that happened after the death of the Prior, John von Huesden, as related by Thomas à Kempis; for he and the Brethren at Mount St Agnes were intimately concerned in them. After the death of the venerable Father, Brother Gerard Naeldwïc, who had been the Procurator or Bursar of the monastery of Windesheim, was elected Prior on the vigil of the Epiphany of our Lord. He was much grieved that he had been chosen, and unwillingly consented. For being of a meek and obliging disposition, impatient alike of honour and responsibility, he humbly besought the members of the community at the next assembling of the General Chapter, with much urgency and with many prayers, to be relieved of the care of so great a government, and to be set free from the Priorate; and after some consideration among the Brethren, he had his desire granted. When he was liberated Brother William

Vorniken, Prior in Mount St Agnes, was elected to be the Prior of Windesheim, by the Fathers of the congregations still assembled at the same sitting of the General Chapter. Consternation, however, seized upon him when he perceived that he had been elected — not without cause fearing the formidable burden. He wept moreover much, exclaiming aloud that he was unworthy; and urgently endeavoured, by every possible means, and with many reasons that he urged, that he might be excused. But being constrained by obedience and by the authority of the majority, he was compelled to yield assent and undertake the yoke of so great a burden for Christ's sake. His election being confirmed, he was duly inducted into the office of Prior, and all in that House gave thanks unto God and rejoiced. But, adds Thomas, there was no little distress of soul and weeping at Mount St Agnes that their faithful Pastor should be taken from them, because another like unto him was not known.

In another chapter Thomas proceeds to tell us concerning the election of a successor to Vorniken, their Prior, in the year 1425. The House of Mount St Agnes, he says, being destitute of a pastor by the election of him who had been taken from it, and translated to the superior House, it was necessary, according to the canons, to provide another suitable person as Prior. The Brethren therefore being assembled, and the mass of the Holy Spirit having been celebrated in the convent on the Sunday after Whitsunday, the heads convened a chapter of the whole House. And by the voice of every one present Brother Theodoric Clives, our Sub-prior, was elected. At this election the Prior

of Windesheim, who had but lately been Prior of Mount St Agnes, and the Prior of the House of the Blessed Virgin, near Northorn, were present, who confirmed the said election, made in due form according to the authority invested in the body. This Brother Theodoric was one of the older Brethren, and among the first that had been invested in this House; he had for a long time been held in great esteem, and had written homilies for summer and winter, with certain other books.

Hitherto Thomas à Kempis had not held any official position in the monastery, the election, however, of Theodoric to the Priorate, led to his being chosen to fill an important post, to which allusion will be made at the commencement of the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

Thomas à Kempis is made Sub-prior of the Monastery — The mystical character of his teaching—Thomas and the Brethren driven from their Monastery—The Death of his own Brother John.

THE sub-priorate having become vacant, it was the custom of the Prior to choose one, with the approbation of the Brethren, to hold the office, to assist him in things spiritual relating to the House, as the Procurator or Bursar did in things temporal. It was at this time, in the year 1425, that Thomas à Kempis was chosen to be the Sub-prior at Mount St Agnes. Those present were well aware that there were few persons better fitted for the office, or one whose influence for good would be more truly felt, and there is little doubt that they approved and rejoiced in the selection of their Brother, who had now been nearly twenty-six years with them in the monastery. He was at this time forty-six years old, in the best of his days, well experienced, matured in judgment and in the knowledge of the Divine life. This office led him to have the charge and training of the novices, and to be brought into intimate relation with them; for alone with the Prior he had to take a prominent part in upholding and advancing the spiritual welfare of the community. This would oblige him to promote conferences on sacred subjects among the Brethren; to animate them to the

performance of their religious exercises both in the church and in their cells; and on certain occasions to preach to them from the pulpit. There are extant three sets of his sermons to novices, and one set to the Brethren, which he appears to have delivered to them during the time he held this office now, and on a later occasion when he again filled it. In the prologue which Thomas à Kempis has prefixed to his sermons for novices, he thus speaks:—

To my beloved Brethren in Christ, to Innocentius, Simplicianus, and other disciples of the Crucified One, diligent disciples of our holy religion: your Brother pilgrim dwelling in the vale of tears humbly asketh the assistance of your prayers.

May the peace of God abound in your hearts, and manifold patience be granted to you and to me in the cross of Christ.

These sermons, which, in the manner of an agreeable collation for our novices, delivered at various times indeed, I have collected together, and deemed it right to communicate them to you in love, thinking it a pious act. Although the language, then, may be uncultivated, and the matter not very deep, yet, desiring to please the single-minded, I willingly offer to the pious and devout for perusal, that which the Lord has inspired and given. If perchance an indiscreet word shall offend any one, I beg that pardon may be granted to a little one; and what seems to sound absurd to those abroad in the world shall be amended. And since examples often move hearers more than words, I have therefore—instructed by the custom of B. Gregory—in several places at the end of my sermon, for greater attestation, briefly noted some examples as they occurred to my memory. Accept, gracious Brethren, what I offer to you as dear friends. Pray that all things may be done to the glory of God and the advancement of many.

It was in the discharge of the duties of his office as Sub-prior, and in order to make his efforts for the good of those he had to watch over more successful, that he

was led to draw up a short and concise Form of rules or precepts, which he could propose and offer to those who had recently come among them, and desired to conform themselves to the principles of religion which the Brotherhood of Canons Regular had in this place adopted. The Form is found among various other smaller writings of à Kempis; and something of the kind was probably sketched out for himself when he first set himself to be a pattern of what a Christian monk should be, the which he afterwards more carefully and pointedly revised when he found it might be useful for others who were like minded. It is entitled by him 'The Little Alphabet of the Monks in the School of Christ:' and the precepts are all such as may well be used by those who are ardently endeavouring to follow in the steps of Christ; though there are some few which may not be received with favour by all. Having these rules in a condensed shape before their eyes, à Kempis designed that those who had dedicated themselves to a religious life, should constantly keep them in mind and continually endeavour to be conformed to them.

There is something peculiar in this Form, which reminds us of a like composition in Holy Scripture, viz., that of the cxix. Psalm, where, as every student of the sacred volume knows, the initial letter of each verse in the several sections of it are appropriated to the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; and by some this Psalm has been called the 'Saints' Alphabet.' Whether this Psalm suggested the idea or not, something similar to it is adopted in the 'Monk's Alphabet,' though it is not so perfectly carried out, or to the same extent: but here under nearly all the letters of the Latin alphabet

some godly counsel is given. It commences with this short prayer:—

Shew me, O Lord; Thy ways, and teach me Thy paths.
Yea I beseech thee, O my God, instruct me in the ways of a good life, for the saving of my soul.

Then follow the words of the Master:—

- A. Love to be unknown, and to be accounted for nothing ; for this is more healthful and more useful to thee, than to be applauded of men.
- B. Be thou Benevolent to all, both to the good and to the evil ; and be Burdensome to none.
- C. Keep thy Heart from wandering thoughts ; keep thy Mouth from vain speech, and all thy senses under the rein of discipline.¹
- D. Love solitude and silence, and thou shalt find great peace and a good conscience ; for in a multitude there is much noise, and a great distraction of the heart.
- E. Choose Poverty and Simplicity, and be thou content with a few things, and thou wilt not soon be given to murmur.
- F. Shun conversation with worldly men, for thou art

¹ The words in Latin, with which the first counsel begins, are, *Ama nesciri* ; the second are, *Benevolus esto* ; that of the third, *Custodi cor tuum* ; and so on, taking up the letters of the alphabet consecutively as the initial letter in each of the sentences. It is to be observed that the first sentence under the letter A, viz. *Ama nesciri, et pro nihilo reputari*, is one of the few expressions which is found word for word in the *De Imitatione Christi* (lib. i. cap. ii. 3). The instruction had been drawn from the writings of St Bernard, who, in his third sermon on the nativity of our Lord, says, ‘Tu ergo, qui Christum sequeris, absconde thesaurum. *Ama nesciri* ; laudet te os alienum, sileat tuum.’ It had been thoroughly received among the Brothers of Common Life, and the words *Ama nesciri* had become proverbial among them.

not able to be satisfied with both God, and men ; with things eternal, and things transitory.

- G. Give thanks unto God always from the heart, as well as from the mouth, even in trouble and in sorrow ; for God providently disposeth all things in the world, with a true and righteous judgment after the counsel of His Eternal Wisdom.
- H. Humble thyself in all things, and humble thyself to all ; and thou shalt be deserving of thanks from all. Thou wilt also be acceptable to God, and beloved of men ; the devil will quickly flee from thee, because of the virtue of Humility, which is wholly contrary to him.
- I. In every good work have a pure intention to please God, Who is the Inspector of the heart, and loveth the just and pure.
- K. Account such as persecute thee and speak evil against thee, as thy rarest friends and benefactors ; for if thou rightly judgest and considerest the matter, thou canst acquire great gain thereby. For they who oppose thee in what is evil, are profitable to thee for what is good.
- L. The Kingdom of God is obtained by labour and pains, by tears and cries. Paradise is lost by delights and honours.
- M. A great gift of God it is to be poor in this world for Christ's sake, and to keep to the lowest place. The devil is continually tempting thee to seek after high things, to go about after honours, and to avoid what is despised ; so that the climber may fall down backwards, after that he has domineered for a brief space over the poor. Account the least gift as

great, and thou shalt be accounted worthy to receive greater.

N. Despise no one : hurt no one. Condole with the afflicted ; assist the needy ; and never for doing this extol thyself.

O. Let thy whole time be usefully spent with God ; for nothing is more precious than the time allowed thee to obtain the kingdom of God in perpetuity. Exhibit also to all men a friendly, courteous and affable behaviour. Every good work refer to the glory of God ; and do nothing without counsel and deliberation.

P. In every work thou undertakest, always in the first place inquire whether it be pleasing or displeasing to God. Do nothing against thy conscience either for fear or love. In matters that are doubtful have recourse to the Holy Scriptures and the obedience due to thy superior ; and do not confide too much in thyself. Learn to be silent rather than to speak ; and be willing rather to be instructed than to teach ; for it is safer to be hid than to appear.

Q. Do not give thy judgment in other matters which do not appertain to thee, neither do thou intermeddle with them, if thou wouldst always have peace. He who zealously follows the common duties of life, and avoids singularity, will be more beloved, and will more quickly arrive at a good end.

R. Return to the interior matters of thine heart, and shut the door of thy lips. Do not begin to wander after the various desires of the world, when the devil tempts thee. Listening to evil things is hurtful to the soul ; the beholding of beauty is a temptation, and the bearing of censure is disturbing. Depart

therefore from the passionate man, from the ignorant and dissolute also, and abide alone with God in silence.

S. Be temperate in thy diet, modest in thy apparel, prudent in thy words, honourable in Thy behaviour, deliberate in counsel, strong in adversity, humble in prosperity, grateful for benefits, cheerful under contempt, patient under pain, and discreet in everything thou doest.

T. Fear to offend God, even by the least neglect or defect in Thy duty. Do not presume when things are prosperous, neither despair when things are adverse. The fear of God will make thee depart from what is sinful, and will solicit thee to engage in every good work, that the good thou doest may be well done.

V. Sell all thy advantages to God, and He will give thee better in one hour, by His grace coming to thee. No one is so rich, no one so free, as he who hath given himself, and all that he hath to God, and who by love hath bought Christ, Who hath redeemed the world by His Cross.

21.¹ Let Christ be thy Life; let Him be thy Lesson; let Him be thy Meditation, and thy Discourse; let Him be thy Desire, thy Gain, thy whole Hope, and thy Reward. If thou seekest anything else but God purely, thou wilt suffer loss; thou shalt labour and shalt find no rest.

22. The singing of Hymns and Psalms is the work of

¹ Here two letters are at fault, but, to make up the number of the alphabet to the twenty-three letters, two lessons are here introduced, which I have numbered 21 and 22.

Monks and Clerics, with whom the choir of Angels rejoice, praising God continually in the Kingdom of Heaven.

To serve the flesh is the death of the soul, is to make food for worms, a nest for devils, a life like that of the beasts, and fuel for disease, is the corruption of bodies, the defilement of manners, the destruction of all that is good, the acquisition of innumerable evils and sorrows.

To serve God, on the other hand, is the blessedness of the soul, the health of the body, the skill of the spirit, yea it is life. He sings sweet hymns to God, who always praises God in the midst of his tribulations. The beginning and end of every good religious life, is to love God from the heart, to praise Him with the mouth, and to edify his Brethren by his example.

Z. Come down, Brother Zaccheus, from the height of human knowledge. Come and learn in the school of God the way of humility, meekness, and patience; through which, by Christ teaching thee, thou wilt be able at length to attain to the glory of eternal blessedness.

THE CONCLUSION.

Write, O new monk, this Alphabet in thine heart, as in the book of Life. Every day look into thy paper (*chartulam*) and accustom thyself to good manners. The words are few, but they have a deep mystery; and set forth the labours of those that attain to perfection. They serve to adorn the exterior, and give rest within. From a contempt and abnegation of thy-

self the life of a good religious monk begins, and is carried on, until he comes to the very vision of God.

THE BENEDICTION.

Blessed is that Disciple who follows Christ, through the rough way; committing himself to Him, not choosing or refusing anything for himself; but bearing his cross daily, for Christ's sake, that he may with Him obtain great glory and Eternal Life. Amen.¹

In these terse, practical directions given in this Monk's Alphabet, and in the fervid emotions of the interior life of à Kempis exhibited in some of the Soliloquies lately brought before us, we have the very essence of that Scriptural and practical Mysticism which, in common with the Brothers of Common Life, he cultivated and enforced. And it is not too much to say that all real and earnest religious life will more or less partake of this mysticism; for there is indeed in the religion of Christ a mystic power, a grace given and obtained of a supernatural kind, to those who endeavour to conform their lives to the example of their Lord, and truly seek His presence and help. And this presence and help of Christ is only to be fully obtained by consciously coming to Him, and by living in accordance with His holy will. Mysticism, in fact, asserts that we may hold personal conscious communion and intercourse with God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; and that the Holy Spirit will be imparted in some mysterious manner to those who earnestly desire to follow

¹ Thom. à Kempis, *Breviora opuscula complectens*. *Alphab. Par. Monac.*, vol. ii. 262-264, Som. ed.

His guidance. It is but asserting in a more distinct and forcible manner the truth and requirements of God's Word, that they who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth; and that God delights in such, and will come to them and make His abode with them.

It is the recognition of a most wonderful and gracious element in the religious life, that the infinitely great and incomprehensible Ruler of the Universe, Who made us and daily sustains our life and the existence of all living things, will condescend to hold communion with us, and of which, by some inner perception, He frequently gives us certain knowledge. Are we not told by Christ Himself that if we keep His commandments and love Him, He will love us in return, and manifest Himself to us? And when one of His disciples wished to know how this marvellous Presence should be realised, while the world should be unconscious of it—unable to comprehend it by any natural law—He but affirmed the truth more fully, by saying, 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make our abode with him.'¹

This internal manifestation of the Divine Presence in the soul of the true believer is not a matter to be explained; sufficient that it is promised and has been realised by the true followers of Christ ever since He made the promise.

Thomas à Kempis insisted and taught that this high privilege could not really exist, or be maintained, without observing the conditions of the Gospel; and, that those who would enjoy the promise must fulfil the pre-

¹ St John xiv. 23.

cept. None but those whose hearts were filled with the love of Christ, and were endeavouring to keep His sayings, must expect to have His presence and favour with them; and that if they did not strive to become like their Lord and Master, and to love Him purely, they would only be deceiving themselves by imagining they could hold fellowship with Him.

And this Scriptural Mysticism which the Brothers of Common Life embraced, and which à Kempis largely taught in his works, and especially elaborated in that most acceptable of all his works the 'De Imitatione Christi,' was as the infusing of new life into the religion of those days. It was much needed amid the darkness, deadness, formality, superstition, and corruption that prevailed.

It said in substance that no mere attachment to the Church, or obedience to her priests, would avail for a man's salvation unless he lived a new life, and shewed that his heart was in the service of God. It profited little to engage in a gorgeous ritual, or to observe numerous ordinances. Something more and infinitely greater was needed for the welfare of the soul, and that was the new life—the effort to live according to the precepts of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Those who, like à Kempis, adopted the mystic life, did not want to overthrow the Church, but to have it reformed and renewed after its primitive purity; they did not slight the ordinances of God and Divine worship, but truly valued them, and encouraged attendance upon them. What, however, they did require and sought after was that the heart should be engaged and not that a mere outward service should be paid, or accounted

sufficient. They did not despise learning or a systematic study of Theology, but vigorously did their part in promoting both one and the other; but what they zealously contended for was that these things could not be put in the place of religion, any more than a faith without works, or fervent feelings without the practice of Christian virtues.

It was not sufficient to be deeply read in patristic lore, or to have a large and accurate knowledge of religious truths; very excellent as these were, they would be all of no avail and only lead to self-deception, unless the heart were inflamed with the love of God, and the life conformed gradually to His holy will. But if a man were fully devoted to Christ, if he were sincere in his religious profession, if the work of sanctification were truly going on within him, and manifesting itself in his daily life; why then should he be content with a lower kind of religion, why should he stop short of enjoying the higher blessings of the Christian life—the promised fellowship of Christ our Lord, the entering into that rest which remaineth, in some measure, for the people of God, even in this life? This is only the natural outcome and result of the interior life—of a life hidden with Christ in God. It is without exaggeration, and without presuming on more than is written and held out to us in the Gospel, the fruit and blessing of one thus thoroughly devoting himself to Christ and living to Him: it is a high and happy state of soul, to which all true Christians, however unworthy they may feel themselves, should aspire, and which they may moreover realise in their own breasts, and keep for themselves as a glorious possession, an inestimable privi-

lege, though it be one of which the world knows little or nothing, and regards with something like derision. This mysticism points to a secret source of spiritual power within the soul, a Divine power on which the Christian life depends; it speaks of Christ living in the heart, of Christ being the centre of the Christian's affections and hopes, the strength and life of his inner existence.

These remarks have been drawn forth because we have now arrived at that period in the life of à Kempis when he must be more fully regarded in the light of a Christian Teacher; and it is important to bear in mind that the Mysticism of which mention has been made was one of the chief characteristics of his teaching. It is clearly and frequently manifest in his writings; it is represented in the Interior life which he advocates, and which he also practised. An illustration of this in the life of à Kempis was given at the beginning of this work, which shews how greatly he valued it, how gladly he availed himself of it, and how sensitive he was of it. I allude to the habit he had of withdrawing himself from his Brethren, as if from a sudden impulse, when he felt any devout inspiration come upon him, or earnest longing to hold communion with Christ; for regarding it as a call from Christ, he would ask permission to retire and then return to his cell. This shewed how truly à Kempis realised and prized the mysterious Presence of his adorable Redeemer, whenever he was inwardly drawn to hold sacred intercourse with Him.

Constantly did he incite those who sought his counsel to cultivate this hidden life with God. It was not a subject that he would speak upon to men generally, for

there were only some fitted to receive it, and who could profit by it. But a few were led to the practice of it not only by his instructions but by his example; and glorified God for having given them such a Brother who so clearly witnessed to the truth of Christ's promised manifestation of Himself to His faithful servants.

This interior life was not, however, thus regarded by all who heard of it. Some looked upon it as the pursuit of an enthusiastic visionary, and presumptuous fanatic. Some scoffed at it, and also reproached him for arrogance, in thinking that he could ever thus talk with the Divine Being, as a man would to his friend. Was he not a sinner like all other men, though he was a 'religious'? Was it not almost blasphemous for him to think that the Great God would condescend to hold such intimate intercourse with him, who was but a frail human being like themselves, and so also for Thomas to attempt thus to converse with Him, as with a real person? Thomas heard of these taunting remarks, and it grieved him sore; he considered again with himself whether there was any ground for complaint, and whether he should alter his course, and lessen his exalted faith in prayer. None knew better than he did, none recognised more than he did, the Divine majesty of the God Whom he addressed. None felt more deeply than he did the sinfulness of his own heart; he did not hide it from himself, or try to make it out that he was better than others, for he felt the plague of sin working still within him, and that he needed pardon as much as others. Yet this, he knew, should not keep him back from holding sweet and close communion with the blessed Saviour Who had invited him to come boldly

to the throne of grace, and open his whole soul to Him as he would to his best and bosom friend. His own conscience acquitted him of acting presumptuously ; but as the matter troubled him, he must, like Hezekiah of old, take it and spread it before the Lord. And in a devout colloquy we have the substance of what was said on this solemn and sacred occasion, how this matter was referred to Christ, and what he received in answer from Christ Himself. A few passages will suffice to illustrate the subject:—

Let it not seem absurd to any one, that I should desire frequently to hold converse with the Lord my God, Whose loving-kindness often attracts me, slothful though I am, and inflames the desire in me for prayer and meditation ; since it would sound harsh and ungrateful to me, not to respond to His calls.

But perhaps some one may speak against me, Dost thou not then fear GOD, since thou art indeed an unclean sinner, and unworthy even of life itself? Whence arises in thee this presumption of heart?

And since thou art the least of all, and more to be despised than all, why dost thou still thrust thyself into Divine colloquies? Whom dost thou make thyself to be?

O Lord, my Beloved, answer for me, because the mouth of the wicked is open upon me. If I would justify myself, my own mouth will condemn me: and if I am clean, my soul knoweth not this very matter. Thou knowest my foolishness and my confusion ; speak Thou, I will gladly hold my peace.

And *the voice of my Beloved* answered, ‘Heed not the words of them that reproach thee, but listen rather to what I have said. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will? Who shall resist My will?

‘If I choose to confer a benefit in some measure upon thee, although the least of My servants, who shall convince Me of sin?

‘Let him who is without sin first cast a stone at thee. But if

they also are sinners, why do they detract from grace? Thou didst not choose Me, but My mercy hath preceded thee.

‘And dare any still murmur against thee, because thou hast approached unto Me? Truly his murmuring is not against thee, but openly against Me; because I receive sinners, and eat with them.

‘And wherefore shouldst thou not claim to thyself My friendship, which I rejoice more to exhibit than withdraw?’

Then I replied, ‘O Beloved Lord, do not impute it to them, but to me and to my sins. I do not deny anything for which they think ill of me. I confess, and acknowledge this, since it is much worse than what is known.’ . . .

The Beloved.—‘Finally, after the pardon of sins, after penitence and complete satisfaction, I for the most part restore the joy of My saving countenance, by infusing the more abundant grace of the Holy Spirit.

‘And though the sinner still tarry in the flesh, yet do I receive him into my intimate fellowship, so that for the evils committed by him he may no longer feel any confusion of face, but rather the operation of thanksgiving and the voice of praise, because old things have passed away, and all things have become new.

‘So compassionate and merciful am I, that I am always more ready to pardon than thou art to repent, more prompt to give than thou to ask. . . .

‘I rather accuse the rareness than the frequency of Thy approach, and thy timid modesty more than a too great confidence of pardon. To trust in My goodness is an indication of true humility and great faith.

‘These things I say unto thee, that thou mayest not sin; and if thou hast sinned that thou despair not, but quickly rise again; for thou still hast hope, and an Advocate with the Father.

‘Wilt thou wait till thou art made worthy before thou drawest near? And when of thyself shall this be? If only the good and worthy, the great and perfect men ought to draw near to Me, to whom shall the sinners and publicans go?

‘What therefore says the Gospel? It saith, “Then drew near unto Jesus the publicans and sinners, for to hear Him.”¹ Let the

¹ St Luke xv. 1.

unworthy then approach, that they may be made worthy. Let the wicked draw near, that they may be made good.

‘Let the little ones and those that are imperfect draw near, that they may become great and perfect. Let all and every one draw near, that they may receive out of the fulness of the Living Fountain.

‘I am the Fountain of Life, that cannot be exhausted.’ Whosoever thirsts, let him come to Me and drink; whosoever hath nothing, let him come and buy without price.

‘Whosoever is sick, let him come that he may be healed; whosoever is lukewarm, let him come that he may be inflamed; whosoever is fearful, let him come that he may be comforted.

‘Whosoever is sorrowful, let him come that he may be comforted; whosoever is dry, let him come that he may be filled with the richness and fulness of the Spirit; whosoever is wearied, let him come that he may be refreshed with joy.

‘Behold! My delight is to be with the sons of men. Whosoever desireth wisdom, let him come to My teaching; whosoever longeth for riches, let him come to receive those that are eternal and incorruptible.

‘Whosoever is ambitious of honours, let him come that he may inherit an eternal name in heaven; whosoever longeth for happiness, let him come that he may possess it without fear and danger.

‘Whosoever yearns for an abundance of all good things, let him come to Me, that he may enjoy the chief, eternal, infinite Good. I am He that giveth all temporal goods, and more than temporal; I bestow the Eternal in the heavenly kingdoms.

‘Nor will I fail in My promise, when the salutary observance of My commands have been fully kept. He shall be gloriously crowned in heaven who hath lawfully contended in this world.’

Such words as these, coming as it were from the Divine Saviour—the Beloved Bridegroom—must have been a great comfort and support to Thomas, and given him strength and resolution to persevere in this most sacred intercourse which he held with Jesus, notwith-

standing the scoffs of those who derided him, and condemned the practice. Thomas acted in the full consciousness and unsophisticated belief that he was speaking to God his Saviour, and that the same glorious Friend graciously condescended and vouchsafed to answer him, and inform him inwardly of His holy will and how he should live. Like the prophet of old who stood upon his watch-tower, he waited upon God, keeping silence before Him, and, listening with a soul opened to receive the messages of His grace, and the instructions of the Divine life, he hearkened to what the Lord God would say concerning him, and what he should answer when he was reproved.

And it is no little matter of thankfulness that à Kempis did not desist from thus holding such exalted intercourse with his Redeemer, but was encouraged to persevere, as it affords a beautiful example and encouragement to all thoroughly earnest Christians to rise to this inner and higher life with Christ. For let not those be kept back from this sweet and refreshing fellowship with Jesus, with the thought or idea that it is only imaginary, or for visionary enthusiasts; for if they have the witness in themselves that they are Christ's, if their lives give witness that they are faithful followers of their Lord and that they are being made conformable to His image, they are warranted by the promises of Christ to avail themselves of it, and should go forward in faith, feeling sure that in some way—however mystical and supernatural it may be—Christ will fulfil His word.

And then again, it is a matter of thankfulness that à Kempis persevered in thus maintaining a personal fellowship with Christ, because in the 'De Imitatione

Christi' we have the mature fruit of his blessed intercourse very largely set forth. Thus in the third and largest book of that work, which has been generally received throughout Christendom as one of the most valuable treasures of devotion, the greater part is composed of such like sacred colloquies afterwards held between Christ and this humble and faithful follower of His. Very interesting is it to notice the several sublime and holy subjects relating to the Christian life which are brought forward: such as—How to live before God in truth and humility—The Power of Divine Love—How to moderate and subdue the desires of the heart. There is, however, a long list of subjects to which I must refer the reader. In the fourth book also, relative to the Holy Sacrament, it will be found that there are many passages, and even whole chapters, of Christ speaking to the soul. And the matter in the second book likewise, treats mostly upon holding intimate converse and friendship with Jesus. So that the chief characteristic of this very work, which is said to be 'a book for making saints,' is that which we have just called attention to in the spiritual history of à Kempis. And it is easy to see the peculiar kind of agreement there is between the books of the 'Imitation' and the history of the inner life of à Kempis; how one is the sequel or outcome of the other; and that from his holding these precious interlocutions with the gracious Saviour, we have these his choicest counsels of Divine wisdom. I would here ask the reader to look at the 'Imitation,' book ii., chap. i. 1, 2, and chap. viii. 3, 5.

After the election of Theodoric as the third Prior of their House at Mount St Agnes, à Kempis records

many sad circumstances that happened in the Diocese of Utrecht, to which they belonged, and in no small measure affected their own monastery and other religious bodies in the land. These arose in consequence of a schism in the Diocese which ensued upon the appointment of Sweder de Culenborgh to be Bishop in opposition to the noble Rodolph de Diepholt, who had been chosen by the majority. The dissensions and disunion continued a long time, and involved not only the clergy and religious bodies, but the leading citizens of the larger towns.

The first approach of the storm which threatened the Brotherhood on Mount St Agnes, made itself visible before the close of the year 1425. Sweder de Culenborgh, contrary to the majority of those who had the right of election, was confirmed as Bishop of Utrecht by the authority of the Papal See. And while he was received by the citizens of Utrecht and some other towns, he was not accepted as Bishop by the towns of Overysse, especially those of Zwolle, Campen, and Deventer. On this account these cities were placed under an interdict, and a great controversy arose among the clergy and people; as some were for observing the interdict, while others, who were greatly in the majority, were opposed to paying any heed to it. 'Alas! Holy God!' exclaims Thomas à Kempis, 'on St Lambert's Day it was enjoined upon us that we must suspend our singing on account of the Interdict. Therefore, upon our observing the Interdict, the nobles of the land and a great number of people were enraged against us and other religious Houses: we endured much opprobrium and were at length compelled to leave our monastery

and the country on account of our obeying the Interdict.' This latter calamity was, however, for a while deferred ; since this expulsion was effected on the feast of St Barnabas, before the setting of the sun in the year 1429.

It was a sad and mournful sight to watch the Brethren in this trying hour of misfortune. They had met together once more in the chapel of the monastery, and had engaged in a final service, in which they commended themselves to God's protecting care. They hastily gathered together some of their manuscript books and a few necessary things to take with them ; and, bidding a tender farewell to a few sympathising neighbours who had assembled to see them take their departure, they, with one more look at their beloved home, resolutely turned their faces and began their exodus. Winding their way down the sides of the Mount in the direction of Zwolle, the procession of saintly Brethren, among whom the figure of Thomas à Kempis, still Subprior, was seen with no ordinary regard, moved on their journey. Whether the Brethren went through the town of Zwolle is not mentioned. Probably they might wish to avoid encountering both the opprobrium of those who were opposed to them, as well as the warm greetings of firm friends, for great excitement prevailed respecting their expulsion, and they would wish to leave the country as quietly as possible without raising any ill feeling by passing through the town. And if so, then they would probably make a detour to the north, about a mile before coming to Zwolle, and crossing the river Vetch, they would shortly again strike into the main road which led them to their first night's resting-place,

which most likely they would reach before it was quite dark, for the days were then nearly at their longest; and the sweet summer evening, closing with its soft twilight and cool air, would somewhat refresh and calm their weary and troubled souls.

The Brethren of Mount St Agnes remained the first night at Hasselt; and the next day they sailed to Friesland, and went to their Brethren in Lunenkerck: and here they stopped, for needful accommodation was speedily provided for them; and in the retreat and consolation of this House they began as it were a reformation, for, by the help of God drawing them, many of the Brethren there during this sojourn were brought into a good condition. About twenty-four Brethren, cleric and lay Brothers, were brought over in the ship at that time.

After stating that they had observed the interdict for upwards of a year, à Kempis gives the names of the Brethren who were driven forth. They are evidently put down in the order in which they ranked in the monastery. Thomas à Kempis then proceeds to say how it fared with them.

‘All these were hospitably received that first night by the Sisters in Hasselt, who exhibited the great charity of humanity towards us. And because we had been forcibly expelled they grieved and wept for us very much. And when beds and suitable resting-places could not be found for all the Brethren, the Sisters, compassionating our condition, gave up their own couches, and prepared places with hay and straw for sleeping upon in the stable, that we might rest comfortably together. Many of the citizens also in Hasselt

feeling deeply our condition shed many tears. But some of the citizens begrudged us any assistance, and, thinking evil of us, derided the Brethren and spoke ill of them. Many of these, however, were afterwards sorry for their behaviour towards us. The next morning at the break of day, having taken our food for the voyage with us, we were conducted to a little vessel. in the harbour, and proceeded by way of the sea, rowing and sailing, not without great danger—for the wind was contrary to us; being desirous of getting to Friesland for the name of Christ, and for our obedience to the holy Roman Church. And having committed ourselves to God's care, He, exercising His compassion towards us, both delivered us from the perils of the sea, and brought us in safety to our Brethren at Lunenkerk.'

Thomas à Kempis being Sub-prior, and being highly esteemed for his godly counsel, must have taken a prominent part in supporting and encouraging the Brethren to bear up under their unwonted trials. It was a new and bitter experience of life to him and them; but it was not without its good. This passing under the rod was sanctified to their spiritual profit, and refined their characters. The ways and words of God were to be interpreted in a new light; and fresh insight into their meaning was vouchsafed unto them. How forcibly would they feel themselves to be like strangers and pilgrims upon the earth! How often would they remember that troubled sea over which they had passed; and, when afterwards sweetly singing the Psalms in church, how vividly would they enter into the feelings of the sacred penman when he said: "They that go down to sea in ships, &c." And then how heartily and

feelingly would they join in the chorus that follows : "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness ; and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men." And so also, how fully would they enter into the meaning of the Prophet's words, who said : "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

The blame for the persecution which à Kempis and his Brethren endured lay, as I have shewn elsewhere, at the door of the papacy, and not at that of those who were contending for their just rights, and who strove to avert the evil machination of their enemies. And though Thomas and his Brethren yielded to the interdict, and, rather than break their vow of obedience, which they at least regarded as most sacred, would go into banishment and suffer this cruel treatment, yet had they alone to thank those who laid this iniquitous interdict upon the land ; an act which was not likely to increase their love or that of their countrymen for the papal system, which was exercised with such tyranny and heartlessness.

But to return to other matters during the period of their banishment. Thomas à Kempis records that, on December 14, 1430, our beloved Brother John, the priest, a native of Campen, died. He was the third who came after the four Brethren first invested with the Order. He died in the afternoon, and was buried on the left side of Brother Octbert ; that is, in the cemetery of Mount St Agnes ; for we shall see from what is said below how this came about. This man wrote out particularly well many singing books for the choir. He was a good singer, modest in his demeanour, and was

very useful and experienced in various labours, especially during harvest time, and whilst the buildings of the monastery were going on. He had at the time of the expulsion proceeded with the Brethren to Friesland, but being very sick he desired to return to the monastery, and to remain along with the few laymen who had been left as guardians of the place. Afterwards his sickness increased upon him, and having fulfilled thirty-one years as a 'religious,' he slept in the Lord, before the rest of his Brethren returned.

In the year 1431, Brother Gossuin Becker died at Lunenker.

But the saddest thing for Thomas à Kempis was the sickness of his own brother John, for whom little hope of recovery was entertained. This led to Thomas leaving the Brethren in their exile, to visit and minister to his brother in his declining days. For fourteen months he was constantly by his side, watching over him, and attending to his every want with loving and fraternal solicitude, smoothing his pillow and aiding him in his preparation for his journey to another world. This brother had led, as we have already seen, a most exemplary life; he had done a great work in his day and generation, and had been the instrument in God's hands of turning many to righteousness. He was highly esteemed among 'the Brothers of Common Life,' and had on many occasions been chosen as the pioneer for extending their operations. But we shall here give the memorial account which Thomas records of him.

In the year 1432, on the fourth day of November at 12 o'clock at night, Brother John à Kempis died, the first Rector and Confessor of the Convent of Sisters of

Bethania near Arnheim, in the 67th year of his age. He was Rector or Prior in various places, and in several new Houses. He was the first Rector on the opening of the House at the Fountain of the Blessed Mary, near Arnheim, and invested several persons. Afterwards he was elected Prior of Mount St Agnes, and presided there nine years. Then he was sent to Bommel, and began the House there with a few persons. Then again he was elected Prior of the House of the Blessed Mary near Haerlem, in Holland, where he presided seven years. He was also for some time with the monks in Bronopia, near Campen, where he was made the first Rector. At length he came to the House of Bethania, which, being interpreted, is the House of Obedience, where he ended his days happily *in obedience*, and in a good old age, and was buried within the cloisters after vespers, when I was present, since I had closed his eyes. For the 'Visitatores' had deputed me to be with him; and I remained with him one year and two months.

In the same year after Easter that House (Bethania) was incorporated into the General Chapter.

We find nothing recorded of what these two saintly brothers said to each other at this solemn time, and how those fourteen months were passed. It is perhaps well that a veil is drawn over the sacred moments, and the devout communion they held one with the other respecting holy things, and the prospect of their being united together again in a happy eternity with their much beloved Saviour. Those whose privilege it has been to wait upon a dying saint, through long seasons of weariness, if not much of bodily suffering, will not have much difficulty in picturing to themselves the

scene in that cell at Bethania, and how the brothers spent their time in tender sympathy, frequent prayer, and holy aspirations, longing for the light of blissful immortality. Sitting together in still silence amid the gathering twilight of a summer's evening, with its hallowing influence, we can imagine the sick brother recovering his strength a little, breaking the deep quietness that prevailed, and uttering some such words as these, which were once heard on a similar occasion :—

There is a secret in the ways of God
With His own children which none others know,
That sweetens all He does ; and if such peace,
While under His afflicting rod we find,
What will it be to see Him as He is,
And past the reach of all that now disturbs
The tranquil soul's repose? To contemplate,
In retrospect unclouded, all the means
By which His wisdom has prepar'd His saints
For the vast weight of glory that remains.

And then at last the end came ; and Thomas was left alone, still a pilgrim on the earth, as he often felt and expressed himself to be ; and as he took a last fond look at that form, doubly dear to him, *i.e.*, by natural ties and spiritual kinship, we could fancy ourselves listening to these other words of sacred minstrelsy :—

Servant of God, well done !
Rest from thy loved employ,
The battle fought, the victory won,
Enter thy Master's joy.

In the meantime the Brethren, from various parts, whither they had been scattered, were permitted to return again to their several Houses.

After the death of his brother John, Thomas à Kempis also returned to his monastery at Mount St Agnes. It is probable that during his absence another Brother had been appointed to fill the office of Sub-prior, and that he remained for awhile in a private capacity, for we hear of his filling another office afterwards, and then being re-elected to be Sub-prior again. In the meantime he continued the Chronicles of his House, from which we shall give some further particulars in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

The Chronicles of Mount St Agnes continued—A Kempis becomes the Procurator—The Election of a New Prior—A Kempis again made Sub-prior—Counsels given to the Novices.

IN the present chapter I purpose to embrace the events of twenty years in the life of Thomas à Kempis, that is, from the time he was about fifty-two till he was seventy-two years old. In the quiet and regular life of a monastery one day succeeded another in much the same way; it was naturally less eventful and less exciting than that which is found by those who take a prominent and active part in the affairs of the world. Still there were necessarily changes, and a variety of occurrences happening, even in this secluded kind of life, which could not fail to stir the calm tranquillity which pervaded the place, and awaken in the breasts of its inmates deeper thoughts, and fresh sympathies and interests.

It would appear that during the first part of this period of twenty years à Kempis was living among the Brethren without holding any special appointment. It had been necessary, when he was called to attend his own brother in his last illness, to appoint another Sub-prior in his place, and now, when he returned to join the Brethren again, he took a place among them without any office. After awhile he was made procurator or bursar of the monastery, This post, however, he held

only for a short period, and again became a private member of the community. Another important change shortly occurred in the monastery, and à Kempis was again chosen to fill the office of Sub-prior, which he continued to hold for some time. These changes will be severally noticed in the regular order of events as they occur, and while proceeding I shall gather from the writings of à Kempis as far as possible his own feeling and sentiments in the discharges of his duties, and in the promotion of spiritual life in himself and others.

In the year 1433 à Kempis records the investment, on the third Sunday in Lent, of three clerical Brethren: Brother Herman Craen of Campen, Brother John Zuermont of Utrecht, and Brother Peter Herbolt of the same place. These were received and welcomed among the Canons Regular in the usual manner.

Then occur the names of several others of the community who died; and among them, à Kempis records that of Brother Alardus, a priest of Pilsum, an aged man, very courteous, who departed on the festival of the Finding of the Cross. He was more than seventy-six years old, and had been a 'religious' thirty years. This man was diligent in celebrating mass, and was most devout. It was his endeavour to be always the first to enter the choir; and until the infirmities of his last sickness prevented him, he was ever ready to assist and wait upon the Brethren in the common refectory. It had been his wish to die on the festival of Holy Cross, and he besought that his petition might be granted, because he was accustomed frequently to celebrate at the altar of the Holy Cross. And so it happened unto him.

'He was often wont to say unto me,' à Kempis tells us, 'that the best dish he got in the refectory was the sacred lesson to which he listened,' and that therefore he was unwilling to be absent at the time of eating lest he should lose the fruit of the sacred lesson. He said to à Kempis, moreover, 'I rejoice much at the sight of the Brethren, because I see the whole convent before me engaged in eating under wholesome discipline.' When through the infirmities of age he was at length so oppressed that he found it difficult to go alone, he would nevertheless often approach the gate of the choir with the help of a staff that he might hear the Brethren sing. And then he would take the water that had been blessed, and would reverently bow towards the high altar. He had several times been blessed with special consolations from God when he celebrated there.

In 1441 the plague again broke out. Several in the monastery were infected with it, and a few of the Brethren were cut off by it, among whom we notice Christianus, the 'Infirmarius.'

In the same year Thomas à Kempis finished a work on which he had been a long while engaged, and this was in writing out a fair copy of many of his own treatises in a neat, compact hand, so as to form a duodecimo volume: these are all bound together in a little thick book; and at the commencement all the four books of the '*De Imitatione Christi*' are found, and form about a third of the whole volume. On the last page of the volume the signature of the author, Thomas à Kempis, with the date of its completion, is found subscribed. The book is still to be seen in the Royal

Library, Brussels. It is a precious relic, and testifies to his diligence and ability in writing, the which were of much account before the invention of printing was fairly developed.

In the year 1443 in the afternoon of St Prisca's Day, the virgin and martyr, our beloved Brother and Priest, John Bowman, who for some time had been our Procurator, died. Often had he this passage from our Saviour's discourse in his mouth: 'In your patience possess ye your souls.' And towards the close of his life, says à Kempis, when I visited him, he would exclaim with much earnestness, 'O how gladly would I go with the Brethren to the choir if I were able, God knows.' He was great in his compassion to the faithful, and gladly read, or some one read to him, the Life and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The sickness and death of this Brother Bowman led to some change in the outward life of à Kempis.

It was on, or shortly before, the death of John Bowman that he was probably chosen to fill the office of Procurator or Bursar of the monastery. From what à Kempis says it is apparent that he was in close communication with Bowman towards the latter end of his life, when infirmities crept upon him and unfitted him for discharging his duties efficiently. And in the absence of more positive information, as to the exact time when à Kempis was made Procurator, it is presumed that he was led to see Bowman more particularly when he was sick, that he might ascertain from him the several duties of the new office he had to fill, and how he could best discharge them.

Now the duties of the Procurator consisted in having

the charge and oversight of household matters. He had to receive the moneys belonging to the monastery, to keep the accounts, to see that the debts were paid, to attend to the due distribution of alms, and to mind that the poor and needy were cared for. He had to take charge of strangers, and see that they were properly entertained; he had under his control the lay-brethren and the youths preparing to be clerics. And once a fortnight he held a kind of court to receive reports of what was going on, to examine into the conduct of those over whom he held rule, and to hear and rectify any complaints or disorders brought to his notice; when, as occasion needed, he either censured those in fault—exhorting them to give more heed to their duties in the future—or inflicted some punishment upon them. In the performance of this latter duty we may imagine that à Kempis was inclined to be lenient, for he was tender-hearted towards others, though severe with himself; but otherwise, his biographer, Badius Ascensius, tells us, he discharged the office of Procurator with becoming diligence.

When we consider, however, the kind of duties he had to discharge, it seems singular that one of so retiring a disposition and of so introverted a turn of mind should have been chosen to fill such an office. Though à Kempis was one that would endeavour faithfully to discharge the duties of any post he was called upon to undertake to the best of his ability, the present calling was not one in some ways congenial to him; and from what we learn shortly after, we find that the Brethren, seeing this, kindly relieved him of the office, and appointed another who was more fitted for it.

But before following him to his giving up the office of Procurator, I would draw attention to the reason which is assigned by his biographer, Badius Ascensius, for his being chosen; for he tells us that it was on account of his charitable disposition and kindness of heart—his being prone to the distribution of alms—that the Brethren elected à Kempis to fill this post. Another of his early biographers also informs us that ‘it would be beyond his power to transmit to posterity his love of God, and with what love and benevolence he was inflamed towards the Brethren.’ Mooren also states that it was for his gentle and social disposition that he was made Procurator. And we draw attention to this feature in the character of Thomas à Kempis, because it may be imagined, as it has been intimated by some respectable authors, that the author of the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*’ was so absorbed in cultivating the interior life, in those mystic intercommunions with our Lord, and in other devout exercises, that he was heedless of what was going on around him, and gave little consideration to the welfare of others; that, in short, he was so wrapped up in the enthusiasm of religious devotions and pursuits, or in the attainment of his own salvation, that he had got into a state of mind above and beyond exercising kind thought and sympathy and making efforts for his fellow creatures, or caring what became of them. This could certainly not be brought against Thomas à Kempis with any fairness, as can be shown, any more than it could be respecting several of whom he writes. For though his mind was much given to study and devout exercises, which are apt to draw off the attention from outward things, and make one less ready and

alive to worldly pursuits, still his religion was not a selfish one, it did not render him indifferent to the welfare of others; the essential characteristics of Christian life, especially that of love towards his fellow man, were not wanting in him.

From the instruction given in the form of a short treatise, ‘Concerning the Faithful Steward,’ we would judge that he must have in no small degree given himself to charitable works, or he would not have felt himself competent to instruct others engaged in them. The salutary advice and the cautions which he gives are well worthy the attention of those who engage in good works, and are benevolently disposed to employ their time and talents for the good of others in these days; and seem well calculated to promote the advancement of all outward works of piety and charity, as well as to establish the character of à Kempis for being unselfish and very charitably disposed, whilst he was at the same time deeply religious: we shall therefore give a quotation or two from it, that the reader may form some idea of it. He thus commences his brotherly charge:—

Since you have now, my dear Friend, undertaken the office of Martha,¹ you must take care that so good and holy an office is not slothfully or carelessly performed, but faithfully executed for Christ’s sake, Who ministers all things to us; and that you exercise this service so as to further your own Eternal Salvation. In the discharge thereof there are certain necessary considerations concerning which you should be admonished, forasmuch as the blessed Paul saith, ‘Moreover, it is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful.’

Whence it behoves him to be *faithful* to whom such a steward-

¹ This term was applied to men as well as to women, who gave themselves more exclusively to outward works of charity.

ship is committed : and none the less also *prudent* that he may not fall into frequent mistakes. Faithful let him be in that which is intrusted to him, that he neglects no business affairs, that he does not through carelessness suffer anything to be spoiled or wasted which may be of use or advantage to the community, but rather see to its being preserved with pious care.

Prudent also must he be in the distribution of things, both with respect to time and person. For at one time it is convenient to give, what at another time it may be proper to refuse. And to some persons it is both profitable and charitable to yield and grant their requests, whereas to others it behoveth thee to deny them. And the necessities of some worthy persons are by your good offices to be prevented, or attended to even before any application to you be made on their behalf.

If, therefore, you act discreetly and weigh the necessities of individuals, you cannot be said to act imprudently. And if you be compassionate to the sick and infirm, and take pity on the helpless and necessitous, considering their condition as if it were your own, after what manner, and in what ways you can do them good, then you have put on charity. Such I desire thee to be, viz., faithful in thy duties, and prudent in counsel.

I would fain have given more quotations from this little work of Thomas à Kempis, but the following must suffice :—

But hear thou, who with Martha art cumbered with much serving. Take heed that thou be not disturbed in thy work, and that thou faint not in tribulation, because there will be abundant occasions of trouble ; and a variety of adversities, and difficulties will not be wanting. Blessed, however, wilt thou be if thou take all things patiently ; and profitably receivest both the evil and the good from God, with thanksgiving.

You will always then have need of patience and prudence ; that through patience you may overcome all manner of evil ; and through prudence graciously dispense the good things of this life to others, although they be ungrateful. For consider well Whom you serve, and what will be the reward of your labours. Is it not Christ, to

Whom you have wholly offered yourself? You are His Martha ; and His will you should fulfil, lest you offend Him and sin. The Lord is mighty to give you greater grace, and even to shew you His glory ; so that you, who so diligently and devoutly serve Him in the world, may at length be called to sit down with Him in His kingdom.

Wherefore, Martha, be of good cheer, for great shall be your reward in heaven ; only be thou faithful in thy ministrations. For whatever you lay out in the service of Christ's brethren, the just Judge will recompense thee in the day of Judgment. When thou omittest to seek thine own pleasure and profit in some way, or when thou postponest some spiritual work, that thou mayest attend to the necessities of others, then thou obtainest from Christ the reward of Everlasting Life, and He becomes to thee the precious and firm Surety of Eternal glory. Whence He speaks after this manner to the Father : ' I will, that where I am, there shall also my servant be.'

O Martha ! what a world of good you may perform, if you are only willing and prepared. The servants of Christ stand in need of your service ; and without your care the children of God are neglected. If then you would make your labour acceptable, do it heartily, not grudgingly or wearily. You are able to exercise great charity towards the poor brethren ; to bring great joy to the members of Christ, that hunger and thirst, and are destitute of necessary things, by apportioning those things which the Lord hath bestowed for the infirmities of the human body.

It is evident, then, from these remarks, and from what his biographers say, that Thomas à Kempis anxiously cared for the temporal as well as spiritual necessities of those who needed help, and that his deep religious devotion did not make him unmindful of the wants of others.

In reference to his tenure of the office of Procurator in the Monastery of Mount St Agnes, it is clear that he did not long retain it. The bent of his mind was

not in the charge or discharge of business; he was not naturally fitted or disposed, as some are, to deal with outward things. He was essentially more of a reflective and meditative turn of mind; he felt within himself that he was not called to the serving of tables, and that he could serve God better, and be of greater service to His people, by giving himself more entirely 'to prayer, and the ministry of the Word.' And it is probable that he anxiously besought that he might be relieved of the post he held. There were others more fitted for, and more inclined to the discharge of, business matters and looking after the secular affairs of the place than he was, while he himself would be better employed in attending to more spiritual works, and in the advancement of true godliness in himself and those around him. So, as his contemporary biographer has it, 'because he was much given to the interior life and devout matters, and consequently somewhat simple in temporal affairs, he was released from the office of Procurator.' He was not, however, long permitted to remain a private member of the community; for, as we shall perceive from what shortly afterwards happened, he was again appointed to a post which he had formerly held, and filled to the great satisfaction of the Prior and his Brethren.

Returning, therefore, to the records of the Chronicle of Mount St Agnes, we find that the next event of moment that occurred after the election of à Kempis to be Procurator, caused no little stir and anxiety among the Brethren, since the Prior—who had presided over the monastery many years, and with whom Thomas à Kempis, from the requirements of the offices he held, was more closely associated than the rest—now sought

to resign his office and retire, so as to be but an ordinary Brother among them. This led to the election of another ruler over the House, and to other changes which have some interest in them. I shall recount them, however, in the manner in which à Kempis records them.

In the year 1447 Theodoric Clive, the third Prior in the Mount—having governed the House for twenty-three years with fraternal solicitude, and being borne down by many duties—did humbly beseech the Brethren assembled in Chapter, that he might be relieved of his office, alleging the weakness of old age, and secret infirmities of the body. The Brethren felt a deep compassion for their pious Father, who had served them so long, and kindly listening to his request, gave their consent.

But the matter was not so easily settled, continues à Kempis. It was necessary to have the consent of the General Chapter of the Mother-House at Windesheim, and the approval of the Priors of the other Houses. A private inquiry was, therefore, instituted by them of the Brethren at the Mount; and it was only when they found that the greater part were of one accord in the matter, and but a few of the younger Brethren dissented, that they, as the proper authority, granted the Prior absolution from his office, and thereby relieved him of his burden; which was done on the day in which the Church commemorates the Dispersion of the Apostles.

Then, according to the Statutes of the Brotherhood, the Prior of Amsterdam and the Prior of Hoern, who had been appointed to carry out the aforesaid investigation, enjoined upon the Brethren the observance of a three days' fast before they proceeded to the election of a new Prior. This done, they, on account of the necessities of their own monasteries, returned to Holland,

and committed to the venerable Prior of Windesheim the business of managing the election of another Prior, enjoining him that he would go, and personally see, that a worthy person was chosen by the Brethren for the office. This was accordingly done by the Providence of Divine Grace. Fervent prayers were offered up to God in public and in private, invoking the help of the Holy Spirit, and the petition of the Brethren for a new Prior came quickly to a good end.¹

The name of this new Prior was Brother Henry of Deventer. The particulars of his election are thus given by Thomas. On June 20, 1448, after the three days' fast, all the Brethren assembled together to sing the Mass of the Holy Spirit. Soon after this had been finished, Sext being ended, the Brethren went from the choir to the Chapter-house for the election of the new Prior. Then the venerable Prior of Windesheim came as desired with the Prior of Zwolle, to take charge thereof. Having given a brief collation or address, and read aloud the form of election, he admonished each of the Chapter, that by the gracious will of God, and in accordance with the Canon law, they should choose a suitable person to be their Prior.

The number of Brethren present who had the right of election was twenty-one. There were two other Brothers who had been a long time absent, who had written letters expressive of their wish. The Brethren that were electors having then departed one by one out of the door of the Chapter-house, leaving the entrance open, the two aforesaid Priors, with the three senior Brethren of the monastery, came and stood near the altar which is in the Chapter-house, for the purpose of

¹ *Chronicles Mt. St Agnes.* Thom. à Kemp. chap. xxv.

hearing and receiving the decision and vote of each of the Brethren ; a position where they could be seen by all, but could not be audibly heard by any of those who stood outside the doors. Then having made a scrutiny of the votes after hearing what each of them in turn had to say respecting their choice, it was found that our Brother, the Sub-prior, Henry Wilhelm of Deventer, had been nominated and elected, having sixteen votes inscribed upon the paper, which gave him a majority. There remained some who had not registered their votes for him ; among whom were the three senior Brethren who had been auditors : and two of the other Brethren gave their votes in favour of the Procurator, John Cluyt, who had but lately been placed in this office, as successor to Thomas à Kempis. Then one of the senior Brethren on behalf of himself and of the majority demanded a confirmation of the election from the superior Prior, who speedily put an end to any opposition by declaring that he would do this on the morrow.

Then, no further opposition being made, nor any charge brought against the method of election, and no one having anything to say against the character of the individual elected, the Prior elect was called upon to consent to the choice of himself, since the election had been canonically made, and it was necessary that the rite should be duly confirmed. Upon this he immediately came forward, and prostrating himself in the midst of the Brethren, protested his own insufficiency, and humbly besought that he might not have the burden and responsibility laid upon him. But when he found that his entreaties could not prevail, and that it was

useless pertinaciously to resist; and being at length overcome by the urgency of the Brethren, as well as impelled by obedience to the will of his superior, he yielded his consent with an humble voice; and for the sake of brotherly love, and the necessary discipline of the monastery, he took upon himself the divine appointment. He was then fully installed into the office by the Prior of Windesheim, being conducted to the choir in the presence of the whole convent; and prayers having been offered, he was placed in his chair. Then, according to the usual order, all the Brethren severally came forward, and vowed obedience to the new Prior as their Father. First came the Brethren that had been invested with the order of Canons Regular, then the 'Conversi' and afterwards the 'Donati.' The rest of the day on which these things were done was spent in great joy and thankfulness; and the presiding Prior, at the conclusion of a paternal exhortation, then bade farewell to all present, and the Brethren returned to their cells. They, however, assembled together again at the sound of the vesper bell, and sang the sacred service with a lively voice.

And now we come to the modest account which Thomas à Kempis gives of his own election to fill the post of Sub-prior again, which had been left vacant by the late election of their Prior, who had previously held the office.

Then three days after the Brethren were again called together in the Chapter-house; an intimation was given to them by the newly elected Prior, that, according to the statute, they should choose another Sub-prior. 'Therefore, on the Feast of St James the Apostle,

before the hour of vespers, after a brief scrutiny of the votes had been made, Brother Thomas à Kempis, one of the senior Brethren, now sixty-seven years old, was nominated and elected, who had in times gone by been deputed to this same office. And although he knew himself to be inexperienced and would have excused himself, yet being entreated to yield obedience, he humbly submitted to the decision of the Brethren, and for the sake of Jesus Christ did not decline to undertake this labour for them ; still at the same time, ardently beseeching the prayers of his friends and the Brethren, he trusted more to the grace of God than to himself.'

Thomas then proceeds to narrate several matters of external interest, some of which much concerned the temporal welfare of the Brethren, and others which affected their neighbours and the country at large. It will only be necessary to give a passing glance at them.

In the same year that Thomas was for the second time made Sub-prior, there was, during the summer season, a great devastation of the standing corn in many places, owing to a plague of mice eating the seed while it was hardly yet ripe. An ingenious contrivance, however, was hit upon by the Brethren for their destruction. Thomas tells us that they made ditches, and placed jars in the earth full of water, and in doing this they displayed so much skill that as many mice were drowned as had in other places destroyed much grain. Nevertheless, the loss occasioned to them and their neighbours in corn, barley, oats, and peas, and other provender that was destined for the animals, was very great.

Then we are informed that, about the middle of the

month of September, there was a remarkable tempest, followed by a great inundation of water, breaking in from the entrances to the sea, which overflowed their pasture lands, and spoiled much of the grazing grass. From the same tempest, he observes, that the ships at sea were exposed to great danger; several of them were lost and many people drowned. 'Yet,' he adds, 'the compassionate and merciful God provided for our necessities in another way, since our fisherman caught from the flood of waters a great abundance of fish, which sufficed to sustain the Brethren and those who sought their hospitality many days.'

In the year 1450, a grievous pestilence again broke out in Holland, Utrecht, Zwolle, Campen, Deventer, and Zutphen, and many devout and religious persons were thereby called to their rest. The winter was a very severe one, and much distress prevailed. During Lent, however, and at the beginning of March, our fisherman, Thomas says, caught a large supply of great 'spiringos,' which sustained our Brethren, while the season of fasting lasted, during which time many poor people were begging at the door for food. Mention is made also of a pilgrimage to Rome this year, for the sake of the Indulgences which the Pope granted to those who journeyed thither; but, adds Thomas respecting the multitudes that went thither, 'some returned sound and well, but many more died in the way, and not a few in the city of Rome itself.'

The reception of other Brethren into the Order of Canons Regular at Mount St Agnes is mentioned from time to time; and so also are the deaths which happened recorded; and among these, about this time, we

come upon the name of the venerable Prior of Windesheim, who had formerly been their own Prior at Mount St Agnes, and one of the senior Brethren of its foundation. This year a new mill was erected for the greater utility of the monastery, and was completed with much labour and cost.

A Kempis records also that, in 1451, a frightful pestilence broke out in Cologne, which carried off 25,000 of the inhabitants. There seems to have been a mission of the Canons Regular of the Windesheim fraternity to Cologne at this time, and it was probably owing to their ardour for a reformation during this great calamity that the House of the Regulars in Cologne, called Corpus Christi, situated in the parish of St Christopher, the martyr, was taken over into the Windesheim Brotherhood. After the Day of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Brother Henry Kremer, of Mount St Agnes, was sent with Brother Gerard Clive; the one to be the Rector, and the other the Sub-prior, of that House. Thus we see how the influence of those who had probably been trained by Thomas à Kempis, or incited by his example, spread abroad to other places.

In 1452 a lamentable fire happened in the famous city of Amsterdam, by which the greater part of it was destroyed, so that scarce a third portion of it remained uninjured. The Devotees there, and several congregations of the Brothers and Sisters, suffered greatly in this sore judgment of God, since fourteen monasteries were almost entirely destroyed by the fire. Hence great misery ensued in this city, such as had not been known before; for many virgins, with virgin-like shamefaced-

ness at their destitute condition, might be seen wandering about, wringing their hands and seeking shelter, so that many hearts were moved to tears for them. In other respects also the disaster was very severe and extensive.

In this same year there died on St Paul's Day at Windesheim, after the hour of vespers, Henry Kremer, mentioned above as having been sent from the Brotherhood at Mount St Agnes to the House of the Regulars in Cologne, to assist in carrying on the work of reformation. And on the morrow, says Thomas, in the octave of John Baptist, his remains were brought over to our House, where he had lived, by the mercy of God, almost thirty-three years as a 'religious.' For having ended his life at no great distance from our monastery, it was his great desire that he might be buried among his Brethren. He was faithful in the business of writing books, and in frequenting the choir; he was also a lover of discipline, and kept a guard over his mouth and cell. He had been Prior at Rickenberrich, in Saxony, for almost eleven years. Afterwards he went as a third companion to Diepenene for a few years; but as he made an urgent appeal that he might return to his Brethren at Mount St Agnes it was granted to him. Afterwards, however, as it has been stated, he was sent to Cologne; but, for some cause not mentioned, returning to Windesheim, he died there, 'and was buried among us.' I cannot but notice in passing two things; first, that we have frequent mention of the Brothers at Mount St Agnes going forth to other places as missionaries, or being employed elsewhere in the work of religious restoration, so that this monastery, as well as

others of the Windesheim confraternity, became the centres of a great religious movement, from which the light and life of the Gospel radiated forth. The second point to be observed, is the natural affection which the Brothers bore to the Home of Christian life where Thomas à Kempis dwelt, so that we frequently find a lingering desire in them to come back again once more, after any absence, that they might be refreshed and re-animated with the spiritual and cheering influence of godly concord and fellowship.

The monastery at Mount St Agnes received as many as it could hold ; but numbers came from other parts, not only from neighbouring monasteries, but from the towns and villages to visit and consult à Kempis. The sick and dying were gladdened by his presence ; the poor and disconsolate were comforted, and the earnest-minded and those newly seeking the way of salvation were guided and strengthened.

Speaking of this period of Thomas à Kempis's life, and his change from being Procurator to that of Sub-prior, his contemporary biographer says of him, 'He brought forth fruit abundantly while in this latter post, by speaking a few words in season, by directing inquiring souls, and admonishing others ; by giving himself to contemplation, and to the exercises of prayer in the Spirit, and to such as flowed from the love of God and His Saints. In consideration whereof it was indeed an act of kindness in his Brethren to release him from all care concerning outward things.'

Among the writings of Thomas à Kempis a paper was found containing short notes or memorandums respecting some poor and much-tried Brethren. In the

familiar names which he gives them he seems to indicate their characters and condition ; and in the way in which he deals with them severally and would cheer them, we see how much he sympathised with them in their trials and afflictions, and raised their thoughts to a happier and brighter world. The paper is headed with these words of Scripture: 'Comfort ye, Comfort ye, My people, saith your God.'

It was, however, with the receiving and training of the younger Brethren, or novices, as they were called, that Thomas à Kempis was more particularly concerned, and in which he was pre-eminently happy. There is an interesting picture given of him, which is said to have been taken from an engraving on copper, found over his grave when his bones were dug up in the burial-ground of Mount St Agnes.

In this picture Thomas à Kempis is represented as coming forward on the elevated part of the chancel to receive a young man, anxiously desirous to forsake the world and its vanities and to enter upon a religious state.

The young man is seen approaching the reverend Father, reverently bending his knee and saying :—

O where is peace? for thou its path hast trod.

This is on a scroll which he bears in his hands, and Thomas à Kempis gives the following reply which is on another scroll which he carries :—

In poverty, retirement, and with God.

Thomas à Kempis had such a modest, gentle, and affectionate manner of addressing those who approached him, yet withal so earnest and after so godly a fashion,

that they were deeply impressed with what he said, and were sweetly won over to holy obedience. As a lowly-minded brother in Christ Jesus, yet bearing with him a continual sense of God's presence, he would talk to them of their affairs, the state of their souls, their trials, and their desires after a religious life, and direct them how to act. Sometimes he would do this as he strolled round the grounds of the monastery with them, or when he saw them alone and separately in his cell, or as at other times in the choir, or a quiet corner of the church, when they came to open their hearts more fully to him, and receive the benefit of absolution together with ghostly counsel and advice to the quieting of their consciences. That we may form some estimate of the character of these hallowed conferences and more private admonitions, we shall here insert a few passages from a small treatise of Thomas à Kempis which is entitled '*Epitaphium Breve, seu Enchiridion Monachorum*' which appears to be the substance of his private intercourse with some of the younger members of the Brotherhood during this period.

Never be thou idle, nor talkative, nor curious, nor given to laughter. Before labour, and in labour, be mindful of the Lord thy God, that He may preserve thee.

Thou art always in the midst of adversaries, and are tossed to and fro amidst the perils of a stormy sea; thou must therefore pray without ceasing that thou mayest not be overcome with vices and drowned in the gulf of evil by despair.

Stand firmly, and do not flinch in thy daily contest, and especially beware of three beasts. In the morning contend against sloth; at noon against gluttony; in the evening against carnal lust.

The dog will sleep long; the wolf will eat a great deal; and the ass will be wanton in lying down. Rouse up the dog with a

whip ; beat the wolf with a staff ; and scourge the ass with prickly thorns. The whip is the fear of death ; the staff is the fire of hell ; and the thorns the Passion of Christ, and the sufferings of saintly martyrs.

With these three weapons the vices of the flesh are to be overcome.

Here is the substance of other discourses with some of the Brotherhood :—

Put on therefore the arms of the Holy Cross ; fight as a brave soldier, study as a good cleric, pray as a devout monk, labour as a faithful servant of God, and thou wilt be gloriously crowned in Heaven.

As one nail is driven out with another, so is vice expelled by virtue, wrath is restrained by silence, gluttony subdued by fasting, sloth put to flight by labour, idle laughter stopped by holy sorrow. Hatred is slain by love, an enemy is appeased by kindness.

Peace of heart is acquired by patience ; and he who accuses others lightly, quickly falleth into indignation. Also to be but little entangled in business leads to the acquisition of peace.

Often it is said, and often should it be repeated, that it may be well borne in mind, that nothing is easier than to say you will do anything, but nothing more blessed than the doing of it, according to Christ's own words, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

Many are full of words, few can keep silence : many are full of desires, few that are contented with a little. But no one is fully satisfied unless he enjoys the supreme good.

Every table is poor where bread and salt is wanting ; and that meal is insipid where sacred reading is wanting, and where vain words abound. The best dish for the soul is to hear the Word of God, and to digest it well.

He is fed with delicious food who is delighted with sacred words ; but he who willingly hears and seeks after vain discourse shall long remain dry and indeavour.

A Kempis held the Lord's Prayer in high esteem.

He had been saying, 'Among the books of devotion nothing was more edifying than the *Life of Christ*. Among the prayers and praises of God nothing was more sacred than the *Lord's Prayer*;' when he takes occasion to speak of the latter after this manner:—

The Lord's Prayer excels all the petitions and aspirations of the Saints: for all the sayings of the Prophets, and all the melodiferous words of the Psalms and Canticles, are contained in it after a most full but yet secret manner. It asks for all necessary things, it praises God most highly, it knits the soul to God, and lifts her up from earth to heaven, it penetrates the clouds, and ascends far above the Angels. Blessed is he who attentively ponders upon every word of Christ.

Here are some sayings of à Kempis, taken from the same source, well worthy of being reproduced:—

He that is proud of any good, is neither grateful nor faithful to God.

Be not exalted with pride, lest thou lose the gift which thou didst receive from heaven without any merit of thine own.

Take care of thy good name, but do not feign thyself better, nor believe thyself holier, than others.

A good life makes a good name; and he who governs himself ill will lose his good name.

Better is good fame from holiness of life, than the sweet odour of precious ointment, or than much riches.

The distraction of the heart soon comes from things heard and seen: but frequent prayer and internal compunction expel all noxious imaginations and superfluous cares.

Shun being extolled for any good before men, for thou hast many faults within which God discerns, but which thou seest not nor considerest as thou oughtest.

He who seeks after the praise of men for some singular deed, doth often by the wise permission of God incur confusion before a multitude openly.

Wash thy hands from perverse work, and refrain thy lips from

idle speech, thine eyes from shameful sights, and thine heart from evil thinking, and thou shalt be clean before God.

You often wash your hands and face that you should not be displeasing to men; how much more should you wash your conscience from vice that you may be pleasing to God and to His angels, who behold the hidden secrets of the heart.

Such words as these, being intermingled in the conversation of à Kempis with the Brethren, exercised a salutary influence upon their minds, and kept alive in their souls a deep sense of the reality of Divine things. His work was a congenial one, and his sphere of duty among kindred spirits, who responded to his elevating sentiments and higher tone of Christian teaching, was inciting to him, and called forth his best powers. The days and hours passed quietly and happily along, and many sweet and peaceful moments did he enjoy in this retired house of religion. And yet the even tenor of his ways was from time to time broken in upon and somewhat disturbed by the many changes and chances of this mortal life. The constant round of duties pertaining to his office, the oft-recurring exercises of devotion, the calm solitude of his cell, and the holy quietude of soul which he possessed, were not entirely free from the various incidents and trials to which other men are subject: still upon the whole his mind was fully and healthfully employed.

There is another small work by Thomas à Kempis, called 'Dialogus Novitiorum,' in which one of the Fathers of the community is represented as talking with a young cleric, on those necessary truths and practices that pertain to the Christian religion. The short preface is so quaint and explanatory that it should not be passed

over. Commencing with the verse, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost,'¹ à Kempis says:—

This is the word of Christ to His disciples. For when the Almighty and most Merciful Lord had satisfied five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, He commanded the remainder of the fragments to be collected, that they should not be wasted. Now, to speak mystically, the fragments of food may be understood to be the sayings of the wise, and the examples of the godly, which ought frequently to be pondered upon by devout Brethren, to be diligently noted and treasured up in books or tablets, as if gathered into a basket, for the sake of reading. And being induced by this consideration, I have, for the incitement of novices, resolved by the help of God to insert in this little work the counsels and examples of some of my predecessors; so that by hearing these good words the Most High God, from Whom all good things proceed, may be praised, and that many reading what is said herein, may be the more inflamed to a contempt of the world.

Thomas à Kempis makes use—as he humbly intimates, and as he has been represented as occasionally doing—of the instructions of those who had gone before him; still there is much of his own godly thoughts mingled with what he says, and since all comes from his pen, and fairly expresses the sort of intercourse he held with the younger members of the community, it forms a most important part of his life's work.

After commending devout conferences between godly persons, the walking with God in a religious life is set forth. The colloquy is opened by a Novice coming to him, after the manner depicted in the picture just mentioned, and asking for spiritual counsel.

I must for the sake of brevity omit much that is

¹ St John vi. 12.

edifying, and can only give one of the closing admonitions :—

With great strength of soul, then, stretch forth thyself to the interior life; and forgetting those things that are behind, and the things of this world, do not look for a pattern to those who are remiss in their duties, and infirm of purpose; but attend to what thou camest for, and to what thou oughtest to do. For he who wishes to make progress ought to begin afresh every day, and neither shun any labour, nor suffer any time to pass idly away. Do not then count the length of days or the number of years thou hast spent in religion; neither glory in the dignity of thine Order, nor in the agreeableness of a delightful place; but ponder well how far thou art still distant from true virtue, and diligently examine in what superfluity of naughtiness thou still liest. For if any man think himself to be something, he deceiveth himself; since by haughtiness of mind the grace of Christ is lost, and the good things which have been long sought for are quickly carried away.

So long as thou art in the body of sin thou must not promise to thyself any security from temptations, or presume to rest from labours; but as a valiant soldier contend against all wickedness: and, until thou receive the crown of glory, hold most firmly to thine heart the shield of patience, in every temptation and tribulation; that with the Apostle Paul thou mayest say in the hour of death, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge shall give me.'

Put on, therefore, the armour of God, and stand ready for the battle; since there are many that war against thee—the flesh, the world, and the devil; who do not cease night or day to assail the innocent, and those who willingly serve the Lord. But do not thou be afraid of them, neither listen to them, nor yield to them; nor do thou consent to their suggestions, however fair and plausible they be; for they speak to thee treacherously, that they may catch and entrap thee, that they may both keep thee at a distance from God, and finally lead thee into all evil.

Watch thou, therefore, in prayer, and daily humbly supplicate

Divine help against the snares of the Devil ; and follow the counsel of experienced Brethren, lest the temptation get the dominion over thee, and the world again allure and entangle thee. Have thou then in mind that which is read in the Apocalypse for the consolation of the soldiers of Christ fighting in the world : ‘Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.’

Considering then the main business which occupied à Kempis at this period of his life, and the many years he was thus engaged as the instructor of novices, it is difficult to estimate fully the value of his sacred labours, and the number of young men he came in contact with, and was the means of inciting and encouraging to holiness of life and devotion to the service of their Lord and Master. And herein we see how those beautiful words of the Psalmist were fulfilled in him, ‘Such as are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God ; they shall still bring forth in old age.’

CHAPTER XIII.

A Kempis as he advances in years—Records from his Chronicles—His Letters—His Preaching—Anecdotes—His Delight in Public Worship—His Sacred Songs—His regard for the Bible.

THOMAS A KEMPIS was becoming well advanced in years; I speak of him now as being about seventy-five years old; but as usual with him he gives little information respecting himself. I have had occasion to make a similar remark before, but it becomes more apparent as he grows older,—there is little to lay hold of regarding him, for he does not like to talk or write about himself or about his feelings openly; and it is often only by some incidental remark that we become aware of some change in his life. Now in one of the entries in the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes shortly after this time, which we give below, there is a passing allusion respecting some other person than himself as having occupied the post of Sub-prior; hence we cannot but assume that Thomas had, from some cause or another, resigned this post. Probably he had desired it finding that greater quiet was necessary for him, for more devotion, and for labours of love and piety; whilst, on the other hand, it might be deemed advisable for the community that the office should be filled by a more active and younger man, and that he himself should take his place more distinctly as one of the three

senior Brethren, who seem to have acted as a standing council of the monastery along with the Prior at their head.

We must not suppose, however, that Thomas now gave up active work, and took to a life of ease; no! there is every reason to believe that he continued, as long as ever he could, to live up to the full exercise of the faculties and abilities God gave him, as much as ever. There is in the Royal Library of Brussels a monument of his diligence at this very period of life, which testifies to his continued labours and industry, and taken along with other things shows that he led no indolent life; it consists of another volume of several of his works, similar to that in which we find the books of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' which, like this latter volume, he had copied out and gathered together from separate treatises which he had composed years before; though those copied out about this period are in a somewhat larger and neater hand than those completed in 1441.¹ At the close of the volume dated 1441 Thomas had subscribed his name as well as the year, when he had finished it, so in this other volume he does likewise, in the following colophon:—*Anno Domini M^o.CCCC^o.LVI. finitus et scriptus per manus fratris Thomæ Kempensis.*

Thomas would then be in his seventy-seventh year; and this had been his main outward employment for the last two or three years. There are those who are able to tell pretty well in most instances from a specimen of anyone's usual handwriting what his charac-

¹ Specimens of the handwriting from both these volumes are given in the *Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi*, Rivingtons.

ter is; but without attempting this in respect of what à Kempis actually wrote, it is clear that he had none of the weaknesses and infirmities of old age creeping on him as yet apparent. There is a firmness of hand, a regularity in the writing, and a distinctness of stroke in the formation of the letters, which denote that he still preserved the faculties of his mind and body in active and regular operation; so that from the clear and manly style of his writing at this time, if we may judge anything from it, we should be disposed to say that he was in good bodily health, in the full enjoyment of his mental powers, and in a happy frame of mind.

Turning, however, now to the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes, he records a few events which I must notice. And in mentioning the characters of several that died, he continues to bear witness to the striking but pleasing fact, that in this corrupt and turbulent age, when there seemed to be such a dearth of spiritual life, there were a few to be found even then, living very earnest and devout lives, in all godly quietness and humbleness of mind.

In this same year, 1456, a sad and most disastrous calamity occurred in relation to one of the lay associates of the monastery which caused no little consternation and grief in the House. It appears that on the feast of St James the Apostle (July 25), this man, for the sake of rescuing some hay, had gone forth with four strong horses, well able to draw the cart, and had ventured too far into the water; for he with the four horses by some means lost footing, and were drowned in a deep lake, which owing to a late excess of rain had rendered the place more dangerous than it was at other

times. Much damage had been caused by the rain, and the farmers were anxious to prevent further loss as far as they could. The remains of this servant of God were recovered, and brought back to the monastery, and buried after compline in the cemetery of the laity. Afterwards prayers were offered up for him by the Brethren in the office of the mass. By the providence of God he, with the other lay associates, had received the Holy Communion on St James's Day, in the morning, before starting out, according to the usual custom. He had lived with them one year, and was very skilful and diligent in the business of a smith.

It is God, blessed over all, observes Thomas, who smites and yet heals; for we suffered more than a hundred florins in the drowning of the horses, but, on the other hand, the merciful Lord preserved our whole country from the ravaging army of the Duke of Burgundy, who had besieged Deventer, for, after the feast of St Matthew, having come to an understanding with the citizens of the various towns of our country, he was pacified and retired.

The deaths of many other Brethren and lay associates are still from time to time recorded, together with the investment of new Brothers, along with various little particulars respecting them individually, which it is not necessary on all occasions to notice, deeming it better to give only such accounts as have some interest in them, or such as Thomas himself would be more intimately concerned in. About this period we have the death of the shoemaker of the monastery recorded, also of the cellarer, of the porter, and of one who had the chief management of the farming operations. These,

although occupying lower stations, were pious devotees, and useful members of the conventual body, the loss of whom would be deeply felt by the Brethren.

In the year 1456, Brother William Cowman died, aged seventy-eight. He had been a 'religious' fifty-five years, and left many good evidences behind him. He was for some time Procurator of this House (where Thomas lived), and afterwards Sub-prior. Then for three years he was Prior of the monastery near Amersford; and lastly he was Rector of the devout Sisters in Canopia near Campen for fourteen years. At length, becoming old and deficient in hearing, he returned to his own spiritual home in the Mount (St Agnes), and died in peace.

In 1457, there died in Zwolle, our Brother, Gerard Wesep, who had been sent to the monastery of Belheem, whither out of obedience, and from fraternal charity he had gone after the death of many of the Brethren in that place, as a faithful spiritual Brother, to attend those who were dying. He himself was at last called away, and his body was brought over, according to his desire, and was buried by the side of Brother Cowman. He was in the seventy-seventh year of his age; and had written many books for the choir, the library, and for prayer, in Latin and German; and vigorously undertook much labour for the common welfare. But chiefly was he very devoted and attentive to the infirm, and to those passing through the agonies of death, not shrinking from close attendance upon the sick and those smitten with the pestilence, on account of his love to God and the Brethren. God did not, however, forget to remunerate him for what he had done for the Brethren

who died at Belheem, for, having been laid up with the pestilence fifteen days, he was taken from his present labours and excessive toils to eternal rest and peace, the which he had long desired, and was wont to speak of to me with his hands joined together. May we not infer from this last sentence that, upon learning of his sickness, à Kempis himself had gone to nurse this Brother, since he here speaks of being with him and listening to his eager desire to depart, and be at rest. This is probable, for the place was not more than three miles distant from Mount St Agnes, being the neighbouring town in which another House of the Brethren was established, with whom those on the Mount had frequent intercourse.

In the same year, Thomas says, our beloved Brother, James Cluit, a devout priest and the first Rector in Udem, died, and was buried in that place before the high altar, in the fifty-third year of his life. His memory will remain a blessing and a praise, since he was beloved of God and by us, for his strict and exemplary piety.

On St Matthew's Day (September 21), 1458, Henry of Deventer, the fourth Prior of Mount St Agnes, resigned his office, which led to the election of Father George in his place. Thomas à Kempis informs us that the retirement of Henry was owing to a lengthened illness, which compelled him to lie on a couch, and incapacitated him from discharging his duties with satisfaction to himself; therefore he besought the Brethren with tears that he might be relieved of his responsibility. They were consequently much distressed on hearing this, but saw the reasonableness of it; and the request having

been properly looked into by those in authority, was readily granted. A Kempis being one of the three senior Brethren, though he had now probably ceased to be Sub-prior, was much concerned in the matter, and was greatly interested in it for the future welfare of the monastery. Father George, who was chosen to be the Prior after Henry of Deventer, had formerly been a Brother of this House, but at this time was prior of a House in Brilis. He was elected in the usual way, at the end of a three days' fast, after the manner recorded in the election of the previous Prior, the venerable Father Prior of Windesheim with two Brethren being present, and the Prior of Zwolle, to take the votes of the Brethren, and to see that all was done according to the statutes of their House. Prior George is afterwards spoken of as a most affectionate Father, and a lover of regular discipline.

In the same year Thomas records the appearance of another pestilence at Deventer, Zwolle, and Campen, when many of the devout Brethren and Sisters in these places departed to be with Christ.

In the same year (1458) à Kempis records the death of 'our beloved Brother and Sub-prior Henry Ruhorst, aged forty, who was buried by the side of William Cowman.' This is a short entry, but it is important to notice it because it informs us that Thomas à Kempis had ceased to be Sub-prior. This death of Ruhorst would necessarily involve the election of another Sub-prior in his place, but no account is given of it. This, together with the election of another Prior, would cause a thorough change in the House with regard to those who had the government of it. There is little doubt,

however, that à Kempis, though he keeps himself in the background, exercised a great influence still in the monastery, not only on account of his being a senior Brother, but also in respect of the repute in which he was held at this time.

Thomas à Kempis records in 1461 the death of their former Prior, Henry of Deventer, who died happily in the midst of the Brethren with Prior George, who were praying around him at the time. He lived four years with them after he had retired from the priorship; and a most endearing memorial of his character is given of him by our author. ‘He was courteous, exemplary, and devout; respectful to all, burdensome to none; he was kind, consolatory, compassionate, communicative, and cheerful towards all, yet quiet and retiring in his manner. He was humble and affable among the senior Brethren and superiors, and gentle and amiable to the younger Brethren and the infirm. It was on account of his good and modest disposition, and his very honourable character—allied to his fidelity and honesty in transacting business, in keeping his position, in speaking, and in being silent as a “religious” ought to be,—that he was first made Procurator, and afterwards chosen to be the Sub-prior, and at length, by the favour of God, elected to be the fourth Prior of our House, which he held in peace and charity with all. He was ten years Prior, and ruled those under him with a gracious and modest demeanour rather than by terrifying words. Persevering in devout discourse, prayer, and meditation, he died in the sixty-first year of his age, and in the forty-second of his religious course, and was buried on the right hand of Brother John Zuermont. Many things could be said

about him, similar to what the blessed Bernard wrote concerning Humbert, a friend of God and his devout Sub-prior, who was beloved of God and men ; for, as the servant of Christ, Henry studied to imitate his Lord and Master.'

In recording the deaths of the Brethren and friends of the Monastery of Mount St Agnes there are many short notices or kind memorials of the departed ; and they throw some light upon the picture or home-scene of the community where Thomas, now advanced in years, lived, and still exercised a prominent influence.

Deric ten Water, an honourable citizen and sheriff of Zwolle, an accepted 'boarder,' and very favourably inclined towards the devotees, died in our House. From a design of serving God more entirely and of remaining with us, he had been six weeks as a guest and an invalid, and was very beneficent to our House in life and death. And being strengthened with the Sacraments of the Church, he rested in peace in the sixty-eighth year of his life. A Kempis as senior Brother often visited him, and ministered spiritual consolation to him. Deric was buried in the sepulchre of his mother, in a stone sarcophagus before the altar of the Holy Cross.

In 1467, after Whitsuntide, our Father George built a new kitchen for the use of the convent, larger and more durable than the former one, which was old, and had been covered over with reeds and straw, and which had to be removed on account of the danger of fire, and certain inconveniences.

This year also, says à Kempis, by the blessing of God, owing to frequent showers of rain, our orchard

yielded a large abundance of fruit, and the fields a rich crop in the time of harvest. Therefore special thanks were offered to God in the mass, and the seven Psalms sung in the choir, for the fine weather we had had.

In the same year there died, on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude, Arnold Nemel, the original proprietor of these lands, and our neighbour. He was a good friend to our monastery, and was buried near the west passage before the door of the church, in the sepulchre of his son.

And here I must again speak of Thomas à Kempis, and the special work in which he had all along been engaged. He still loved retirement as of old. The quiet seclusion of his cell was pleasant to him, for it was hal-
lowed by many seasons of sweet and sacred intercourse with his Saviour, and refreshing showers of Divine grace. Here he still carried on his work of writing as time allowed. A calm serenity seemed to possess his soul, and holy and heavenly thoughts would ever and anon stir within him, and raise his affections upwards to God and things above. He still indulged in moments of devout contemplation, and hearkened to catch the still small voice, speaking to his soul, for he felt more than ever, what other more advanced and perfected souls have done before and since, that the 'true life of man is life within.' One other recreation in which he indulged himself at this period of his life, I gather, was in thoughtfully reading over some good book by himself. A favourite saying of his, and one that he frequently uttered, more especially as years advanced upon him, was, 'I have sought for rest in many things but found it not, except

in little corners, and in little books :'¹ intimating hereby where, and how, much peaceful repose and quiet for the soul is to be obtained ; that is, not in great and worldly things, but in calm reflection upon truths, which were fully accepted, which he had adopted as living principles and proved to be faithful by experience. For speaking of the character of these little books, Tolensis adds, 'And these are for the most part those sentences which, having been drawn from the writings of the ancients, examined, and certified, we possess from Thomas.' Hence this rest was not to be found in running up and down in the world after this thing or the other, but in retirement ; not in great things but in small ; not in many and large volumes, but in a few and little books ; and not in reading much, but in frequent recollectedness of the spirit and self-entertainment in what he did read. There was accordingly a rough portrait of this venerable man, drawn when ripe in years, probably by one of his contemporaries, with the above sentence engraven on a book, which he had by him. Tolensis, moreover, tells us that this picture of Thomas à Kempis was seen by him, with the said inscription upon it. This would be about a hundred years after the death of the saintly man, and in the same House where he had lived so long, where it was shown as a devout curiosity to such as visited the place. But the above writer adds that it was somewhat defaced and obliterated. Thus, in accordance with the motto, we may apply to him his own words, 'His cell was made to him a Paradise, the Church or choir a Heaven ; while the

¹ 'In omnibus requiem quæsi, sed non inveni, nisi in Hoexkens ende Boexkens.' Tolensis, *Vita Thom. a Kemp.*, sec. 12. The latter words are evidently Dutch.

Word of God was his food, and the bread of angels his hidden manna to feed upon.'

This love of retirement and sacred devotion did not, however, with him sink down into dreamy idleness, or sluggish inactivity; it was a principle of life with him, which he seems to have carried out to the end of his days, to be always usefully occupied, and to change from one employment to another as soon as, or even before, signs of weariness appeared. He had been well instructed in the science of life by those who had gone before, and he knew that to maintain a healthy vigour, even in his religious exercises, he must resolutely in due time turn to exterior labours, and the claims which others had upon him. From prayer therefore he would turn to writing, and from sacred contemplation he would pass to the outward duties of his calling, and from intercourse with God to hold suitable intercourse with his fellow-men. This begot in him a calm and thoughtful, yet cheerful and peaceful, demeanour; and his converse with men bore traces of the high communion he held with Jesus in private. Yet, though always occupied, he never seemed in haste, or suffered himself to be worried with the little provocations or untoward events which happened, but appeared to take all things as from the hand of God, and to do all in the conscious endeavour to please Him. His time was thus never wasted, and yet he avoided crowding too many things into a little space, so that in whatever he did he could give his whole mind to it, and do it with all his might. He had leisure to wait heartily upon God; leisure to attend faithfully to the necessity of his fellow-men; and leisure earnestly to look after himself and his own salvation. Hence his

cultivation of the interior life did not make him unmindful of, or indispose him to enter vigorously and mindfully into the outward business of his life and the claims which others had upon him.

We have seen how willingly and earnestly he conversed with others upon holy things for their welfare, and especially with the young men under his charge, training them for a godly life. In addition to this we find him writing letters to those who were at a distance, who had in any measure been brought under his influence, and to whom he thought he might do good. There are several of these to be found in his works. They differ somewhat from the style of modern letters, but, as might be expected from this devout follower of Christ, he is ever anxious for the glory of God, and the saving health of the persons whom he addresses, while he does not fail to make many suitable and just remarks.

One of the letters was written to a member of the same Brotherhood, who had been indiscreet, or had in some measure fallen into trouble, and whom à Kempis was desirous of recovering, that he might establish him in the fear of God: it contains some very valuable counsel.

A letter has sometimes more influence with one whom you desire to help and influence for good than a set discourse. The person addressed feels that you have yourself given some thought to him, and are interested about him; and, on the other hand, he is drawn to think for himself, and can more deliberately consider what you have said; it keeps up a bond between you, which might otherwise be lost sight of when separated from

one another. Of this means of doing good Thomas à Kempis frequently availed himself.

There is another letter written to a well-disposed friend about the Hidden Manna, as an encouragement for him to advance in the spiritual life. It is rather a long one, but it contains many precious words of spiritual counsel, and was much valued by the Brothers of Common Life at St Agnes, into whose hands it afterwards came. The person addressed had evidently suffered long from grievous calumny, and while smarting under, what he thought, unjust charges, had given way to angry passion, and had in other ways offended; he had in fact been neglecting the interior life, and lost much of his peace of mind. But, conscious of these things, he deeply bewailed his sad failures, so much so, that he began to despair of ever overcoming his infirmities and besetting sin. He had either consulted Thomas, or Thomas had by some means been informed of his state, and become interested in his welfare, the result of which was the letter.

But another more prominent duty which à Kempis discharged, was that of *Preaching*. He does not seem to have had the fire and burning eloquence of Gerard, the founder of the Brotherhood, or of such as seem to storm the proud citadel of man's heart, and bring it low; neither had his preaching the point and piquancy of the more learned. His manner would appear to have been one of calm reverence, as if speaking fresh from the presence of God to man, and out of a full heart; which had a solemnity and softened fervency, which told upon men, and inclined them to listen to him. When asked to preach for the good of others he never, or very

rarely refused. He usually preached without MS., the which, however, he did not do without having some time for previous meditation, and even a little sleep, did he feel weary. Very many flocked to hear him from the cities and more remote places, who had heard of his fame and desired to listen to him.

He also gave, when Sub-prior, and probably afterwards when one of the senior Brothers, regular addresses prepared with great care. In his works are to be found three series of *Sermones* and *Collationes* from his pen, for the special use of the *Novices*; and one series addressed *ad Fratres*; as well as *Conciones*, which were mostly designed for Church festivals; these, as it has been said, 'he wrote in clear and flowing diction, and with rich applications to life, impressively propounding the doctrine of his practical and devotional mysticism.' Those delivered to the Brethren are without a text, save the first; and may be regarded more in the light of lectures, and are somewhat after the style of the many various little treatises which he has written.

At the close of some of his sermons he gives an anecdote or two to enforce, enliven, and elucidate what he has said. They are all of a simple character, but a few of them will be adduced to show his readiness in turning to account what happened among them. Here is one on sincerity:—

Two Brethren once came to the house of a certain nobleman and territorial chief, for the sake of some Monastic service. The honourable chief, looking attentively at them then, considered well the outward dress and manners of them both. And upon their going away the sagacious man said to his wife in private—not speaking of it openly to any one, 'It seems to me that one of

those two has either lately arrived there, or wishes soon to withdraw thence.' To whom the wife said, wondering, 'How do you know this ?' He replied, 'From the dissimilarity of their dress and bearing, and from their words and manners, I conjecture a difference in their way of living.' After a short time, then, the hidden matter openly appeared.

Here is another anecdote of a sad defection from the Brotherhood, and a falling into the terrible snare of the devil; which must have had a solemn warning for those who remained:—

A certain devotee, sorely tempted by the Devil, went out from the Congregation of the Brethren, to obtain the solaces of the world in vain amusements. Having then left the humble community of the Clerics, he frequently associated with companies of the laity. And on a certain day, going out of the gate of the city, he began to play with his companions for money; and playing a long time he lost a sum of money; and what is worse, the reputation of a good conscience. The game at pyramids being at length finished, he was urged to pay his debts without further delay. He then by base subterfuges refused to deliver up his money; he fights vigorously, he endeavours to run away, he objects to pay anything willingly. The players becoming excited, and rallying round him, cry out against the perfidious debtor, like ravenous dogs against a wolf; they lay hold of him, strike him with their hands and curse him with words, saying, 'Give up, you scoundrel, what you owe.' But still he would not agree with his exactors, and they, becoming exceedingly angry, gave him many hard blows for a few pence. At length, having revived again, he is brought back to the town by certain persons. Then he sent word to his devout Brethren—countrymen of his—entreating them with many prayers to visit him, now greatly oppressed with weaknesses, that he might relate to them the history of his wretched sufferings. For the lute of worldly frivolity was now turned into lamentations of bitterest affliction. The kind Brethren, hearing these things, visit the sick man, and compassionating his afflicted soul, they seriously blame the erring one for his admitted wickedness, saying that the

blows he had received were just. 'For if,' say they, 'you had remained in the community, you would not have received so many wounds.' Then, sorrowing much, he confessed that he had acted foolishly and had sinned. 'Therefore if I recover,' he said, 'I resolve, by the favour of God, to amend.' And many of the Brethren hearing of these misfortunes were seized with fear, became more constant, and made greater progress.

Here is a third anecdote told by Thomas à Kempis illustrating the value of intercessory prayer:—

A certain pious Brother of our house intending to celebrate mass, previously visited another Brother out of charity who was grievously ill. The sick man, therefore, entreated him to pray earnestly to the Lord for him in the mass; that if it pleased God, he might be again restored to health. The priest, then moved with compassion, and desiring most affectionately and at once to comply with this work of love, prayed the merciful Lord for the Brother's recovery. When the mass was fully concluded, he immediately went again to visit the sick Brother, and asked him how it was with him. The sick Brother replied, 'Thanks be unto God, I feel that I am much better by virtue of the mass, which out of charity thou hast read for me to-day.' After a few days, the Brother that was sick recovered his health. This circumstance left so strong an impression upon his mind, that from that time he became more and more zealous in his devotions and pious studies, and at length, after some years, was raised to the office of Prior.

This would probably be Henry of Deventer or Prior George, to whom Thomas à Kempis alludes in his *Chronicles of Mount St Agnes*; and as Thomas occasionally speaks of himself in the third person, it has been suggested that the other brother who prayed for him was Thomas himself.

I now give what is called 'an example of Patience,' or what was said by one who had travelled much, concerning its rarity, and yet its desirableness. The Brother

is probably Thomas himself. The account is given at the close of one of his sermons to the Novices:—

One of the Brothers asked a certain stranger, coming from far, saying, ‘Tell me, my friend, what good thing you have heard and seen in the way?’ He replied, ‘I have heard the patience of the poor praised enough by many; but have seen it imitated by few.’

‘What more have you seen?’

He said, ‘Among delights I have found thorns; among honours, I have seen sorrows; and among riches I have found frequent strifes and great cares.’

‘Is there no one free from these evils?’

He said sadly, ‘Very few in these days. If there are many, I know not. Happy, therefore, are those Religious, who know how to be contented with few things, and desire to be honoured and praised by none; for God will be their reward. For rarely has such a person met me, who has not grieved for his own ruin, or has not lamented the same concerning his neighbour. But if peace is to be expected anywhere in this life, then the truly humble man possesses it, who patiently endures wrongs, and is silent. He who wishes, therefore, to have peace and a good conscience, let him abandon for the love of God his own will, let him learn patiently to bear injury, and the contempt of men. For so Christ did, in bearing for us the ignominious cross, and in obeying His Father even unto death.”

In the services of the Sanctuary, Thomas à Kempis had a peculiar delight, and engaged in them with enthusiastic fervour and profound reverence. Looking back on his past life, it seemed a very psalm of praise and love. And this did not fail to influence the hearts of those about him, and stir them up also to earnest devotion and hearty worship. Like Arnold of Schoonhoven, the friend of his youth, he was all his life the earliest at the commencement and the latest at the close of the

Divine service. He was indeed like one of those of whom Keble speaks :—

There are, who love upon their knees
To linger when their prayers are said,
And lengthen out their Litanies,
In duteous care for quick and dead.¹

‘It is difficult,’ says one of his biographers, ‘to say how divinely, and with how ready a mind, he discharged all things in the sanctuary and the offices of the Church. Whilst he was singing, he was to be observed with his face always raised towards heaven, as if inspired with a sacred enthusiasm, carried and borne beyond himself, by the wonderful sweetness of the Psalms :—and so after this manner he would meditate—never resting as it were with his heels fastened to the earth, but touching the ground with the extremities of his toes, he seemed to be flying with the rest of his body towards heaven, where in mind and desire he was living. In singing he always stood with his body erect, never supporting himself on a seat, or on his arms, or leaning back. Night and day he was the first to enter the sanctuary, and always the last to depart. What the Divine worship and ecclesiastical decorum were to him in heart and affection, is beyond belief. So much so, that once upon a time a certain person observed in a jocose way, that Thomas seemed to him not only to be happy, but worthy of great admiration, because he sang the Psalms with such cheerfulness of voice, and with such readiness of mind and fervour, that to him the Psalms of David tasted like salmon. To which he at once replied, “It is as you say ; thanks be unto God, the Psalms are to me

¹ Prologue to *Lyra Innocentium*.

as if they were salmon." And then he added, "Yet are they not unfrequently turned to nausea and death, when I see the slothful not attending to what is going on, and not obedient to my voice."

From various passages we learn that Thomas was very fond of music, provided it was employed in the service of God, or in elevating and strengthening the soul. It was at once a refreshment and delight.

And so, in a Manual for young Christians, he adds these remarks :—

The instruments of music in the Church move the hearts of the lukewarm to desire the eternal rewards of the blessed. The pleasant singing of Psalms inflames the souls of such as are dry to their first fervour, through the concert of many voices. The verses of the Hymns recreate the ears of the clerics, so that they sing and make a glad sound in the presence of God and His angels. For as the many pipes in the organ give forth a sweet sound to those who hear it ; so many Brethren, singing together in concord, greatly please God and all the citizens of Heaven. Let us then pray all together and invoke the name of Christ. And may the King of angels bring us at length to the society of the Heavenly citizens. Amen.

And this will be a fitting place to introduce a few of those Hymns or Canticles which à Kempis composed for the use of the Brethren. He wrote them not only that they might sing them together in loving harmony, to animate and cheer each other in holy living, whether in church or in private concert ; but that they might enliven their souls when alone, by the fitting words of holy song ; for it was his endeavour to put soul and gladness into all the religious exercises of the community ; and to have all the Brethren to bear in mind, and to put in practice, the exhortation of St Paul, 'to

be filled with the Spirit; speaking to themselves in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord.'

There are two series of his poetical remains; one at the close of the second portion of his collected works, and another at the end of the third. They may be classed under three heads; those that relate to the monastic and ascetic life,—those that refer to what was the main theme upon which he dwelt, the Imitation of Christ, in various ways,—and the third portion have more the character of ecclesiastical hymns, such as call upon us to celebrate the Holy Trinity, the Life and Passion of Christ, John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist, the Virgin Mary, St Agnes and other Saints. These two latter portions Thomas à Kempis calls '*Cantica Spiritualia*.' They well reflect the mind of Thomas and the earnest, childlike, loving devotion of his character, and though they may not find a leading place in sacred poetry, nor show any remarkable ability in Thomas as a hymnologist, yet are they full of religious enthusiasm, and manifest the endeavour of his life and the desire of his heart.

A selection of Canticles have been kindly rendered from the Latin for me, by one to whom the Church is much indebted for the beautiful hymn, '*The Church's One Foundation*,' out of which a few are here given.

'Vitam Jesu Christi,' &c.

Be the life of CHRIST thy Saviour evermore thine imitation.
 So in pureness, truth, and honour shall be found thy conversation.
 Sing His Birth with holy gladness:
 Mourn His Death with holy sadness:

Mingle gladness with thy mourning in thy spirit's exercises :
 Wipe away thy woes with weeping : ware the world's delights and prizes.

JESUS seek with search unfailing :
 Knock and cry in prayer prevailing :
 In adoring hymns delight thee ;
 Thoughts of JESUS shall requite thee,
 Yet more sweet His joy's fruition,
 Sweeter still His heavenly Vision.
 Bear with love unceasing
 All thy toil's increasing :
 Show the world unkind
 Wisdom's quiet mind :
 Still by prayer and reading
 All thy senses heeding,
 And as hours are flying
 Still thyself denying.

'Apprehende arma,' &c.

Take thy weapons, take thy shield :
 Stray not from the battle-field :
 Hours of ease are loss of glory :
 Loss of guerdon idle story !
 Toil it is that conquers care,
 And the cure of life is prayer.

'Sustine dolores,' &c.

Bear thy sorrows with Laurentius :
 Spurn earth's honour with Vincentius :
 Love thy Saviour with Ignatius :
 Bear life's losses with Eustachius :
 Christ acknowledge with Tyburtius :
 Fight the dragon-fiend with Georgius :
 He who battles with temptation
 Shares the Martyrs' coronation.

'Adversa mundi tolera,' &c.

Bear the troubles of thy life
In the name of CHRIST thy Lord :
Less the harm of stormy strife
Than the easy world's award.

Many a foe means many a friend ;
Earthly losing is not loss !
Patience has her perfect end,
And all good flows from the Cross,

So thou giv'st thy Master praise !
So o'er thee the angels sing :
So thou dost thy brethren raise ;
So thou shalt be twice a king !

Small thy toil is : short thy life :
Grand and endless thy reward !
Through the sorrow and the strife
The confession of thy Lord !

Purer gold and clearer glass !
By thy pains a nobler man,
Through the furnace thou wilt pass,
Bearing all a martyr can.

So thou wilt be sterner foe,
So thou wilt be dearer friend ;
So the saints thy name will know,
And CHRIST own thee at the end.

Call on JESUS evermore,
Be His Cross thy sign alway,
Love the Saints gone on before ;
Ever strive and watch and pray.

Do the right : the truth declare !
Live in hopes that never cease :
Humbly make thy God thy care,
So thou shalt find perfect peace.

'O qualis quantaque lætitia,' &c.

O joy, the purest, noblest,
That fills the heavenly land,
Of JESUS and of Mary
And all th' angelic band :
Glad faces and sweet voices,
Round the Creator's throne,
Adore Him, give Him glory,
Their love and homage own.
There with the peal of trumpets
And thrilling harp-notes clear,
In raiment white and glistening,
The Angel hosts appear :
There on swift wing of service,
Or waiting His command,
In the Thrice Holy Presence
They ever speed or stand.
There 'Holy, Holy, Holy,'
The better country's song,
Quells every sound of sorrow,
Of weeping and of wrong.
There every voice in concord,
There every heart in tune,
Intent in rapture, worship
The Blessed Three-in-One.
There Seraphim and Cherubim
In love and praise adore ;
Praise that is never-ceasing,
Love that is more and more.

State of divinest splendour !
Home of all-perfect rest !
With peace in all thy borders
With light of beauty blest !
The citizens within thee
In purest raiment shine
And keep, in union closest,
The law of love Divine.

Nought is there that they know not :
Their service is not toil :
There never comes temptation,
Nor earthly care nor moil.
There they are ever happy :
There they are ever wise :
There is their lot o'erflowing
With all that satisfies.

O sweet and blest Communion !
Love, Holiness, Truth, Light !
Where reigns the Triune Godhead
In Blessing infinite.
To HIM be praise and honour
From Angels and from men
Whose grace this glory gave us !
Blessed be GOD ! Amen.

As few had a greater reverence for the *Word of God* than Thomas, or studied it more, that he might understand it and follow it, so first and before all things did he incite the devotees under his charge to do so in like manner. Hear what he says on this matter:—

Before all the arts, learn to read the Holy Scriptures, to understand them rightly, to believe them firmly, to live godly and righteously, so that through the help of Christ thou mayest happily arrive at Life Everlasting. For the ignorance of the Divine Law is the mother of error, and the gate of death, the way to lose honour, virtue, and salvation. But the Word of God, and the doctrine of Christ, is the light of life, the salvation of the world, the gate of heaven, the food of the soul, the joy of the heart above all things to them that love God. Wherefore a learned man when converted said, ‘To know a great many things without Christ is to know nothing at all ; if, however, thou knowest Christ well, that is enough, though thou be ignorant of all besides. For without Him they would be hurtful to thee.

Let nothing, therefore, be preferred before the Holy Scriptures ; let nothing be superadded to Christ ; let nothing be made equal to Him Who said, 'I am the door of the sheep ; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved.' And again, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' 'No one cometh to the Father but by Me.' No man cometh to heaven but by Me. No man can be delivered from hell but by Me. Whence St Peter with much boldness of speech cried out against the Jews, 'There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'

Thus did à Kempis uphold the paramount importance of the Bible, and the paramount importance also of looking to Christ above all else, and of listening to and obeying His Word ; for, like a true master in Israel, he taught men not only to read the Scriptures and to try to understand them, but to be doers of the Word also.

Other characteristics in the life and teaching of à Kempis will be adduced in another chapter, and with a few more records of what happened in the monastery where he lived, I must come to the closing years of his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

Characteristics of Thomas à Kempis—Wessel's acquaintance with him—
A Kempis in old age—His last records in the Chronicles—His death,
and other Characteristics.

THOMAS A KEMPIS was now an old man ; yet the weight of years rested lightly upon him. He had long been at peace with God, Who was his refuge and hope, his defence and support continually. He did not relax his labours, but as God gave him strength he still continued copying such books as were needed, and such as would advance religion and learning ; he still continued to instruct his younger Brethren, though not now in charge of them as formerly, and to give private audiences to those who sought his counsel ; he still continued to take an active and fervent part in the religious services of the Church and the sacred 'hours,' and was ever mindful of those seasons of sacred prayer and devout communion with God his Saviour which so much refreshed his soul. Thus did he keep his mind and heart continually occupied, changing from one pursuit or duty to another, and then returning to them again with fresh ardour. This was a principle in his life which he persevered in ; and this doubtless contributed to his longevity, together with that moderate asceticism which he adopted.

Joined then to this wise activity I must notice *his*

temperance in all things. As to bodily nourishment, he never indulged in superfluous food, but rather stinted himself, observing with fidelity the fasts of the Church, and never running at other times to excess in eating or drinking, so that he kept his outward frame free from those ill humours which are apt not unfrequently to spring up and engender disease, as well as to clog the soul, in those that fare sumptuously every day. Neither, on the other hand, did he run to inordinate excess in abstinence and mortification of the flesh, so as to weaken his body, and unfit himself for vigorously and actively serving God and discharging the various duties of his calling. Avoiding that extreme asceticism into which some of the early Fathers of the Brotherhood were drawn, through the intenseness of their religious fervour, and which doubtless cut short their lives in some instances, à Kempis kept within due bounds, and used such self-denials and such abstinence as the Church rightly directs us to pray for, 'that our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may in all things obey his Godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to the honour and glory of God.' Moderate in all things, sensible of human weakness, and ever manifesting the innate gentleness of his disposition he disapproved of all extravagance and excess. Setting out from the principle, 'that all that goes beyond measure and does not keep within its own distinctive limits, can neither please God, nor be of long duration,'¹ he says:—

If you desire to carry through a fixed method of life, you must steer a middle course between two extremes, so as not presumptuously to attempt what is above your ability, nor yet, on the other

¹ *De Disciplina Claustral.* ix. 2.

hand, to leave undone what you are well able to do. God requires of thee, not the destruction of thy body, but the vanquishment of thy sins. He demands not what is unprofitable, but what is conducive to thy salvation. He counsels well, and provides the things necessary for thy life, in order that thou mayest make a good use of the body, to advance the welfare of the soul, but in no point to overstep the proper measure of discretion.

And again, further on in the same work, he says:—

It is hence requisite in every spiritual work, in order to finish well what you have begun, to observe the common rule, to avoid singularity; in doubtful and dark points to follow the advice of the superior, and, with the due measure of discrimination, to yield obedience in all uprightness.

Hence a modern writer observes, ‘In this manner, with temperance in meat and drink, and zeal in ascetic exercises, but without carrying them to an injurious extent, Thomas seems in his own case to have preserved to the last day of his life a healthy state of body and soul, a cheerful disposition, and a fresh and clear eye. It is also in part to be ascribed to the same moderation that he attained to so unusual an old age; whereas we behold Gerard, Florentius, and Zerbolt, who, in the heat of conversion, gave themselves up to excessive penances, dying in early life.’ And this moderation and consistency of conduct extended to other things; and yet Thomas à Kempis zealously practised and taught others to practise *self-abnegation*. Many of his sayings pertain to this subject: thus he represents Christ as saying:—‘My son, forsake thyself and thou shalt find Me.’ And again, ‘Let this be thy whole endeavour, let this be thy prayer, this thy desire; that being stripped of all selfishness, thou mayest with entire simplicity follow Jesus only, and dying to thyself mayest live eternally to Me.’ And

in two short works, called 'Spiritual Exercises,' he enters further and more particularly into the cultivation of the interior life, and shews how a man must deal closely, sincerely, and firmly with himself, if ever he would attain to a more perfect standard of holiness. Moreover, the exercises of *Solitude and Silence* enter largely into the life and teaching of à Kempis, and are regarded by him as Christian virtues. On them he has written a small treatise; and a chapter on both of them will be found in his 'Valley of Lilies.'

He had a favourable esteem also for *learning, knowledge, and science*. A Kempis had lived with men of learning, who took a peculiar delight in it, and he had opportunities for devoting himself to learning, but he regarded it as subservient to higher objects, and was on his guard that the soul should not be wholly given to it. And though he speaks, in one or two places, disparagingly of his want of elegance in writing, and is not ranked among learned men, yet it must not be supposed that he was without learning—that he had a distaste for it, or was indifferent to the promotion of it. Besides reading the Bible diligently in Latin, and copying it out, he had read some of the works of its patristic expositors, shewn a keen appreciation of its mystical sense, and recommended to others the careful study of it. He wrote his works in Latin, and though occasional barbarisms, or rather provincialisms, occur, yet it is admitted that on the whole he expresses himself in the language of scholars with ease and fluency. He loved good and useful books, and took a lively interest in their collection, preservation, and use; considering it as a necessary ornament of a good monastery, to possess as rich and beauti-

ful a library as possible, and reckoning it as one of the standing duties of a true monk to read and write books.

Professor Mooren also, who has thoughtfully read the works of à Kempis, says, 'These admirable discourses, or rather these effusions of a heart enlightened from God, flow as a divine fire which purifies souls with power. These are monastic gardens which flourish under the dew of heaven, thickets which produce flowers of every form and of every colour, of an incomparable beauty. You see there lilies of purity, whiter than the snow, roses of divine charity, blue cyancias of celestial contemplation, dark violets of nightly prayer, the purple flowers of the passion, and other flowers rich in mystical signification.

It is moreover evident that à Kempis must have given no small encouragement to the zealous prosecution of learning, and even to the acquisition of a classical education, from the fact that several of the most meritorious restorers of ancient literature went forth from the quiet retirement of the monastery where he continued to sustain the primitive ardour of the 'Brothers of Common Life' for the promotion of erudition, as well as for holiness of life ; and that in his old age he lived to see his disciples, Rudolph Lange, Moritz, Count of Spiegelberg, Louis Dringenberg, Antony Liber, and above all Rudolph Agricola and Alexander Hegius, labouring with success for the revival of science in Germany and the Netherlands.¹

It is beyond my purpose to give any account of these men, but there is another of the disciples of à Kempis

¹ Ullmann, *Reformers before the Reformation*, p. 135.

to whom I must allude in passing, and this is none other than the famous John Wessel. Hardenberg, his biographer, states that Wessel, along with many other youths, were attracted by the fame of Thomas à Kempis; and averred that his book, lately written, on the 'Imitation of Christ,' had given him his first vigorous incitement to piety; and again, that it had given him the first taste for true theology. Wessel, while yet a young man, came to live in the neighbourhood where à Kempis dwelt, and doubtless had frequent opportunities of hearing him, if not personally conferring with him. Mention is made of his consulting à Kempis about the choice of a vocation in life. There was some difference in the character and precepts of these men, to which I have alluded in a larger work; but in after years, when Wessel went out into the world to battle for the truth, he frequently visited the monastery where à Kempis lived; at one time every year gladly; and while sojourning there for some time, he wrote one or two books of devotion for the Brethren, at their request. It is probable, therefore, that Wessel often consulted Thomas à Kempis in his declining days upon theological questions and ecclesiastical matters, as well as upon the subjects of the works which he published; and perhaps in some degree reflected the views of à Kempis towards the end of his life.

Wessel exercised a great influence in his day and generation, and has been justly called 'the Forerunner of Luther.' The great Reformer himself was so astonished with some of the writings of Wessel, that in a preface which he wrote to them, in the Leipsic edition, 1552, he says:—'If I had read his works before, my enemies

might have supposed that I had learnt everything from Wessel, such a perfect coincidence there is in our opinions. As to myself, I not only derive pleasure, but strength and courage from this publication. It is now impossible for me to doubt whether I am right in the points I have inculcated, when I see so entire an agreement in sentiment, and almost the same words used by this eminent person, who lived in a different age, in a distant country, and in circumstances very unlike my own.' It is this connection of Wessel with à Kempis which, among other things, has led some German authors to regard the latter as in rank of those who paved the way for the Reformation. 'Thomas à Kempis was not, indeed, a precursor of the Reformation in the same sense as Wessel and others,' says Ullmann. 'He was not one in every respect; but he was so in several weighty and important aspects—we may even say with truth, in the very core of his being.'

During the few last years of Thomas's life we have not so many particulars as formerly recorded by him in the Chronicles of his House.

1467 'In the year 1467, on the night of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, after *Te Deum*, a devote laic and "oblatus," Nicolas Bodiken, a faithful servant of Christ, and a special "laudator" of the Virgin Mary, died. A few days before his death he suffered great oppression in the head, and was afflicted with severe pains in others parts of the body, but came joyfully and with full resignation to his happy and much desired end. He lived a long time with us, but on account of the necessities of his mother and grandmother, it behoved him with the consent of the Prior to take

charge of them, and therefore he went forth to them. After they died, however, he returned to our monastery. And then having completed thirty years, he slept in the Lord, having a good testimony from all in the House.

'In the same year on All Saints' Day, after compline, Arnold Gerard of Warendorp, our miller, a faithful laic and fellow commoner (commensalis), died. He was much beloved, and very obliging to all the lay community, and the Brethren. He lived with us fourteen years, and died in the thirty-third year of his life.'

The only item recorded in the Chronicles for the year 1468 is the death of Godefrid Hyselham, a native of Campen, a laic and 'donatus,' aged eighty-three. He had formerly been the miller of the monastery, and is recorded to have been faithful, and modest in his behaviour. Afterwards he was appointed to be the porter, and was known for his kindness and compassion to the poor. At length being greatly enfeebled by age he died in peace, by the mercy of God, and was buried in the cemetery of the laics.

There is only a single entry also in the following year which runs thus:—'In the year 1469, Brother Gerard, otherwise called Cortbeen, priest, and a native of Herderwic, died within the octave of the Nativity of our Lord, on the day of St Thomas of Canterbury, Bishop, in the afternoon before vespers. He lived with us almost ten years in the religious order, piously and devoutly. He undertook much toil both in harvest time and in the winter—cutting down wood in the marsh, because he was a strong man and well skilled in ordi-

1468

1469

nary and difficult work, yet he did not relinquish internal and Divine affairs. At length he was visited by the Lord with dropsy in the legs, and after he had endured his infirmities a while, he "migrated" from the world to the Lord in the forty-second year of his age. After the funeral solemnities of the mass and watching, he was buried in the east passage.'

Thomas à Kempis had now entered upon his ninetyeth year. He had thus become very old and venerable; though not so vigorous or active as formerly, and showing unmistakably the feebleness of old age, he had hitherto been in good health it would seem, and still continued to fulfil a few duties as he was able. He was somewhat shrunk in body, and his face had rather a worn appearance, but his eyesight was still good. He was much beloved and revered by all around him, and by all who came to visit the monastery: and not a few came because of the saintly man, now so celebrated in the Brotherhood who had so long maintained the life and discipline of 'the New Devotion,' and the return to primitive Christianity among them. His very presence seemed to create a sacred atmosphere; all who dwelt in or around the monastery felt that there was a holy influence existing, that pervaded the place; and those who came to visit the House seemed to breathe this atmosphere; it was felt not only in the sacred services, but in the refectory as well as in the Chapel, and the other places, in the tone of the conversation, and the various labours they engaged in.

Thomas himself had not only spent a very useful and holy life among the Brethren, but upon the whole, it had been a peculiarly happy life. I have before adverted to

the humane and affectionate nature of Thomas's disposition, notwithstanding his love of retirement, and seasons of enjoined silence: and it was a constant delight to him to be surrounded by so many loving Brothers, who were, like him, striving to follow their Lord, in all true godliness. Instead of one natural brother, he found a multitude, who loved him better and more purely than brothers often do. Here then was congenial society for Thomas at such times of refreshment from labour and devotion as were needed; intercourse with cultivated minds, with earnest awakened souls, all striving to be true servants of Christ—following in His blessed steps, walking in the same narrow way that leadeth to Everlasting Life. The strict discipline that was maintained among them would not lessen the enjoyment he had in the fellowship of such Brethren, but rather enhance it; for did it not strengthen the bond of holy affection? was not the interest and affection he had for them, and they for him, the more unselfish and real? And well-pleasing and agreeable to the mind of Thomas must it have been to have witnessed and be allied to this well-ordered Brotherhood, and that the zeal and labour of faithful men for the promotion of a godly life among them had not been in vain. On looking back what a blessed company of faithful men he had intimately known through the many years he had lived, who had gone before him; whom he could look forward to meeting again amid the society of the first-born in heaven. He had of late years recorded in the Chronicles the deaths of several advanced in years, who had been fellow-pilgrims with him, pressing forward to the high mark of their heavenly calling in Christ Jesus: and as first

one and then another were called away, he must have longed for his departure to the home above, and have felt that his time would shortly come, when he must put off this flesh, and enter into the presence chamber of his adorable Saviour: and we cannot doubt but that he was living in continual readiness for his joyful summons.

Moreover about this time symptoms of disease began to shew themselves, and he who had been so hale and well hitherto grew infirm. Few particulars are recorded concerning the closing scenes, or the latter portion of the life of Thomas à Kempis. One matter, however, is especially mentioned, which is, that towards the end of his earthly career he was afflicted with dropsy, from which he eventually died. Another writer states that he had tumours on his legs, which is inferred probably from its being known that he died of the above complaint. Be this as it might, it is evident, from the nature of his illness, that he would not be able to move about much, and that he must have been eventually confined to the limits of his cell. Probably as long as he could he attended the services of the Sanctuary. To do this, however, some effort would be required, and most likely for a time he would use crutches; and when no longer able to mount the steps to the choir, would make his way, perhaps with the kind help of a loving Brother, to the chancel door, like Brother Alardus, whose death he had noted in the Chronicles of the House some years before, and there listened with devout attention, but with the solemn feeling that very soon the sweet melody of prayer and praise would be heard by him no longer in the flesh.

Though now contending with both the infirmities of old age and sickness, he does not appear to have been wholly laid aside, for we have some evidence that he continued to do what he could to the last, or at least till within a few months of his death. We still find him keeping up the Chronicle of the House as hitherto; for in the year 1470 we have two entries made; one was respecting the investment of two clerics and one 'donatus,' which took place 'on the third day after the feast of Servatius, Bishop, for the sake of avoiding a tumult of men, and a concourse of secular friends.' This is probably noted because it marked a departure from the usual course of such proceedings.

The other record in this year is the death of Brother Peter Herbort, Deacon, on the day following that of the Martyrs Maurice and his companions, after Matins had begun, aged seventy-five. He was little in body, and by nature greatly debilitated: hence he was unable to keep the rules of the Order in many particulars: yet he often received discipline for his faults: he washed the heads of the Brethren when they were shaven, and frequently read for others in the refectory. At length, having completed forty-three years in the habit of the Order, he came to his end. He was contrite, made his confession, received the Communion, was anointed, and fell asleep in the Lord with a good conscience and in faith. Several of the Brethren with our Prior George were present, praying for him; whilst the rest of the Brethren remained in the choir to sing Matins and lauds. In the afternoon, after vigils for the dead had been sung for him, and other kind acts performed, he was buried in

the east passage, by the side of Brother Gerárd Cortbeen, Priest.

The last entry Thomas à Kempis made in the Chronicles of the House was in the same year in which he died; it is as follows:—

1471 'In the year 1471, on the Feast of St Anthony the Confessor (January 17), there died, early in the morning after high mass, a devout laic, John Gerlac, a native of Dese, near Zwolle, nearly seventy-two years old. He had lived with us for more than fifty-two years in great humility, simplicity, and patience, enduring much toil and penury. And among other virtues which he possessed he was pre-eminent chiefly for that of taciturnity, so that through a whole day he would say very little: also in his labours, and while performing other duties, he was an example of silence. A little before his death he was seized with apoplexy, and was for some time delirious; and was buried among the other laics in our cemetery.'

These are the last words known to have been written by Thomas à Kempis; for here the Chronicle ends, so far as it was written by Thomas. It is then taken up by another hand, which briefly narrates the death and burial of the venerable Canon.

It is pleasing to know that when at last he was compelled to keep his cell, and unable to wait upon himself, there were loving hearts and willing hands, that counted it a great privilege to minister to the aged saint. His eyesight never failed him, for, as one of his biographers says of him, he never used spectacles even when old; and it is presumed also that he retained his faculties, and powers of mind and speech, till very near the end.

It will not then be difficult for us to picture him to ourselves, still gathering the Brothers around him, sometimes collectively and then separately, to give them words of holy counsel; and begging them to assist him with their prayers; and then, as the hour of his dissolution drew nigh, we can imagine their gathering together for the last time to join in the commendatory prayer, and other devotions like the *Sequence* used at the death-bed of his early friend Lubert, suitable for such a time.

We would fain learn more of the last moments of Thomas à Kempis, but the records supply us with scanty information, and with this we must content ourselves. From these, however, we learn that he died at the advanced age of ninety-one, on the feast of St James the less, viz. the 26th July 1471, at the close of a long summer's day, after compline, the last of the Canonical hours of prayer, had been said. He had been sixty-two years in the order of Canons Regular, and fifty-seven in the Priesthood. He had, from his first entrance into the Monastery, endured great penury, temptations, and labours. He had written the entire Bible which they used in the Monastery, and many other books for the House, and for sale. Moreover, in confirmation of what has been already stated, it is said, he composed various treatises for young men in a plain and simple style, but excelling in advice and efficacy of work. Thus he died full of days and full of sanctity. God called him forth from his abode on Mount St Agnes 'to the Mount of Eternity on which he had so often fixed his eyes, which he had so long panted after; and his blessed soul passed into the unfading mansions to enjoy its God for ever.' He was afterwards interred within the

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cloisters at the east end, by the side of Brother Peter Herbort. These particulars are gathered from the short memorial of Thomas à Kempis, inserted in the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes. The last entry of Thomas was, as we have said, in the year 1471. It is needful to mention this again, as it will be seen that the Brother who writes the account in the Chronicles does not state the year, but refers to the previous entry made by Thomas. The memorial of him is on page 137, and is as follows:—

‘Illuc, usque Thomas à Kempis reliqua ab alio continua sunt.

‘Eodem anno in festo Sancti Jacobi minoris post Completorium, obiit prædilectus frater noster Thomas Hemerken de Kempis natus civitate Diœcesis Coloniensis anno aetatis suæ XCII.’ And then follow other particulars which have been given above.

The short notice by the new chronicler before he begins his work of recording the chief events of the monastery is a sufficient warranty that what had been written before had been done by the hand of Thomas à Kempis. I may here, however, add, in passing, that the Chronicles of Mount St Agnes are continued down to the year 1478, in a similar manner to that in which à Kempis had kept them. But since he is no longer concerned in the details recorded, they do not seem to have that interest in them, as when he was alive and noted them down. It is therefore considered unnecessary to give further quotations from the work.

The venerable and much-beloved saint, who had been so long revered throughout the several Congregations and Monasteries of the Brotherhood, and looked up to

as a Father of the New Devotion, had now been taken away from them, and the glory and chief ornament of the House on Mount St Agnes had departed. He was the last of a past generation who had kindled afresh in the breasts of very many the enthusiasm and fire of true religion, and had so held aloft the Lamp of Life, and diffused its blessed rays, that it became a saving guide to numerous souls, so that the moral aspect of the country far and wide had been greatly changed for the better, and been much benefited by its salutary influence. God had, at last, called His faithful and devout servant home to his rest. And those who had known him, would now know him no more: they would now no more see the form of the old man, nor any longer hear his voice. His death had left a blank among them which could not be filled up again, and it is not to be doubted that there were many hearts made sad at the loss of him. Still they must have anticipated his death, as in the course of nature he could not continue much longer among them. He was like a shock of corn fully ripe, and they had the consolatory assurance that he had been gathered into the heavenly garner, and had joined the blessed company of the departed faithful.

The memory of him, however, was sweet and sacred to them. His head, surrounded by a few grey hairs, had been a crown of glory on account of his saintliness, and the remembrance of him was embalmed in the breasts of very many of the Brothers, not only those near at hand, but far off; for long afterwards it was considered a great privilege to have seen and heard the pious and aged Brother of Mount St Agnes; of whom

they loved to speak and recount many things to those about them, and especially to the younger generation springing up. Before his death his visage had become somewhat more elongated than formerly, by reason of his years; and though he in some measure still retained a degree of freshness in his complexion, which had a brown mellow tinge with it, as formerly, yet his skin had acquired rather a parched or glazed appearance. Though past ninety he had not become bent with age, nor had his sight become dim, for till almost the last he was used to hold himself erect, and to read his little books without help. And if any dependence can be placed upon the portrait taken of him in his old age, he had still the same thoughtful look as of one who gazed beyond the present into the unseen world, and who still preserved that calm inward recollectedness of spirit for which he was remarkable.

I have already mentioned several characteristics of the spiritual life of à Kempis, but the chiefest of them was that peculiar, fervent, constant love which he had for Jesus, as for a very dear, but most highly exalted personal friend.

How powerfully this Divine love pervaded the heart of Thomas à Kempis, and mysteriously wrought in him, we may judge from what he says respecting it in several places. 'It is love that brings together the Holy God who dwells in heaven and the sinful creature on earth, uniting that which is most humble with that which is most exalted.' 'It is the truth which makes man free, but the highest truth is love.' 'Made partakers of this love, man reckons as worthless all that is less than God, loving God only, and loving himself no more, or if

at all, only for God's sake.' I do not venture to quote what Thomas says upon the wonderful efficacy of this love of Christ in the 'De Imitatione Christi,' but, as the book is everywhere to be had, I must refer the reader to those chapters where, in a sort of sacred song, he pronounces her eulogy, viz., Book III. Chapters V. and VI. And then also see how he insists upon the way in which we should love Jesus above all things, in Book II. Chapters VII. and VIII. And after reading these it will be easy to understand, why Thomas should say that 'love is of itself sufficient;' and that 'in it he possesses all that he can ever want.' Hence in another place he says, 'Nothing is better for thee, nothing more salutary, nothing worthier and higher, nothing more perfect and blessed, than most ardently to love and most highly to praise God. This I say a hundred times, and a thousand times do I repeat, do it as long as thou livest and possessest feeling and thought. Do it by word and deed, by day and by night, at morning, noon, and eve, every hour and every moment.'

Another most noticeable characteristic of his life, which has been frequently alluded to, was his profound *humility*, such as is rarely seen in the present day; it was deep, unfeigned, and coming very near to the pattern Christ had set; for it led him, according to the prescript received among the Brothers, to try to live unknown to the world, to shrink from holding any post of honour, and to love to esteem others more highly than himself, seeing more good in them than in himself. But if we would learn more as to how it affected him, we must listen to his own words, which truly express his mind, when he says, 'Whoso knoweth himself is

lowly in his own eyes, and delighteth not in the praise of men.' 'Good cause have we therefore to humble ourselves, and never to have any great conceit of ourselves; since we are so frail and inconstant.' 'Without first humbling yourself, you will never ascend to heaven.' And this humility was ever a great safeguard against becoming self-righteous on account of his attainments in grace. 'My son, it is more profitable for thee, and more safe, to conceal the grace of devotion; not to lift thyself on high, nor to speak much thereof, nor to dwell much thereon; but rather to despise thyself, and to fear lest the grace have been given to one unworthy of it.'

A leading principle with Thomas, however, and from whence arose that peculiarly quiet force and beauty in his character as noticed in what has been said respecting Divine love and humility, was the doctrine of *the Imitation of Christ*, so interwoven with his life, as it is also, not merely in the book that bears that title, but generally in all his writings. Even in some of his small poems it forms the leading thought; for two of his hymns begin with these words: '*Vitam Jesu Christi stude imitari.*' He speaks of Christ as the Master of all, the book, and the rule of the religious, the model of the clergy, the doctrine of the laity, the text and commentary of the decrees, the light of believers, the rejoicing of the righteous, the praise of angels, the end and consummation of all the longings of the saints.¹ He says, 'In Christ beam forth as in a pure mirror the consummation of all the virtues, and in no book or science can any thing better or more perfect be found or known than in this Book of Life, which is the true Light. But sweeter than incense is

¹ *Ser. ad Novit.*, i. 3, p. 11

the perfume which the Passion of my Master exhales, comprehending in it a compendium of all graces.'¹

In touching upon other points, it should be noticed that there was a *peculiar gentleness and tenderness of soul* about à Kempis, a thoughtfulness and care for others which made him apt to teach and ready to give counsel: but as there was withal a deference and yielding to others, a readiness to give up his own way and views in things indifferent, it unfitted him for being a ruler or Prior, as his brother John was. He was *firm in regulating his conduct in life*, and *resolute in governing and directing his affections aright*, rising above the influence of outward circumstances, or rather making them the means of his advancement to a higher life. And yet withal he was *a little too credulous*, which led him too readily to accept many of the received views and customs of the age without considering whether they were entirely consistent with the Word of God, which he held as the infallible guide of life: and hence he was, as I have shewn, unlike Wessel, whose zeal for religion he had at first incited, who searched into these matters most thoroughly, and tested them by the light of truth.

Moreover, à Kempis had the highest value of time, regarded it as most precious property, and if lost irrecoverable. Hence he never indulged in idleness, which he accounted most dangerous and baneful, and the fountain of all evil; and therefore he gave heed to the admonition of St Jerome, who said, 'Be ever engaged, so that whenever the devil calls, he may find you occupied.'

In summing up these characteristics of à Kempis's

¹ *Concio*, xii. 'On the Four Methods of seeing Christ.'

religious life, I would conclude with the words of his biographer F. Tolensis, who, at the close of his account, says, 'Those who have committed these few things to paper, testify of *his endurance* in joyfully bearing adversities; of his *patience*, not only in equally tolerating the vices of men, but in kindly excusing them; of his *sobriety, chastity, modesty, application, and earnestness* throughout his life; of *his promoting the interests of the Brethren*, and of the common House; of *his providing Divine exercises*, and such other things as would add more ornament and splendour to the decency and decorum of the sanctuary; of his *assiduity in prayer*, his *burning zeal*, and *frequent profusion of tears*.'

There are a few other interesting matters of a supplemental nature, which will be supplied in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

Other Writings of Thomas à Kempis—The Decline of the Brothers of Common Life—The Finding of the Skull and Bones of Thomas à Kempis—Endeavours to Honour and Perpetuate his Name.

I CANNOT close these memorials without giving the reader some further information respecting a few matters which possess some interest. They relate (1) to some of the other works of à Kempis, besides those already mentioned; (2) to the decline and dissolution of the community of which Thomas à Kempis was one of the chief ornaments, viz., ‘the Brothers of Common Life;’ (3) to the finding of the skull and bones of Thomas à Kempis; and (4) to the endeavours which have been made to honour and perpetuate his name, more particularly at Kempen, his native town, and in the city of Zwolle.

I have already mentioned several of the works of à Kempis, which he wrote in addition to the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*,’ and several extracts have been given from them where it fell in with my purpose, whilst endeavouring to gain a further glimpse or insight into his life and character. There are a few other works, however, which have not been as yet particularly noticed, and seem to call for some remarks. But I would first

observe, that occasionally doubts have been expressed about some of them, as to whether they have been written by à Kempis, and whether they should not rather be attributed to others. It would be a long and weary work to follow these allegations, and contest the several instances in detail. Nor is there need. For while considering a few of the objections in passing, it may be sufficient to say generally, that there has never been any dispute as to his being the author of the great majority of the works attributed to him ; and with respect to those which have been questioned we fall back upon the legal claim of his being in possession of the title to them, until satisfactory proof has been brought forward that they belong to some one else ; and hitherto the claims of other persons have not been sustained, while those of Thomas seem sufficiently good and difficult to overthrow.

For, in support of his being the author of some of those about which there has been some question, there are two witnesses at hand which we may at any time examine : the first is the ancient Catalogue of his works, enumerated by name or title, written and published soon after his death, and before any other pretensions were set up ; and that is the Catalogue given by his contemporary Biographer, to which allusion was made at the beginning of this work. The second witness is the first publication of his collected works in 1494 by George Pirkhamer at Nuremberg. And of this volume of the works of Thomas à Kempis there were a dozen editions printed before the year 1501. (*Vide* Malou's 'Recherches,' p. 87.) And these witnesses, it is presumed, in the

absence of any other substantial claims, will be sufficient to satisfy most reasonable men.¹

Sommalius's edition of the works of à Kempis is that which most modern compilers have taken as their authority for what he has written. On the title-page, he says, the original author (à Kempis) had himself borne witness to having written many of them. (1)

Besides the Sermons of à Kempis to the Novices and those to the Brethren, there are his thirty-six 'Conciones et Meditationes' on the Life and Passion of Our Lord. (2) In these all the chief points of the Gospel History are taken up in order, from the Incarnation of Christ to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the founding of the infant Church at Jerusalem. These 'Discourses and Meditations' were first published by Sommalius, and do not appear in either of the volumes written by the hand of à Kempis. 'Future generations,' says Mooren, 'will thank Sommalius for having saved and preserved this treasure for them; for they will find much that is useful in them, both for their own edification and for the instruction of others.' I am not aware that they have ever been attributed to any but à Kempis.

In addition to the 'Soliloquium Animæ,' from which (3) many extracts have been already given, two of the most valued works of à Kempis which rank next after this, (4) are the 'Hortulus Rosarum,' and the 'Vallis Liliorum.' (5) There is greater connection of thought in the sentences in them than in the 'De Imitatione Christi;' moreover, the passages are not so short and terse as many of his

¹ A third witness to some extent might be called forward, that is, the works which Thomas wrote out with his own hand, and are now in two volumes, in the Royal Library at Brussels.

other writings, and take a more extended view of the work of Christ. They are excellent treatises on religious ethics, with suitable meditations or soliloquies.

(6) I have already alluded to the 'De Tribus Tabernaculis,' and the next in order is the 'De Disciplina Claustralium,' which refers to the regulations and duties of the cloister life among the Brethren, and has been by some reckoned a fifth book of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' Next to this comes 'De Fideli Dispensatore,' in which the duties of a faithful steward are set forth, under the character of Martha.

(8) Another work of à Kempis's is the 'Hospitale Pauperum,' which does not, as the title would lead us to suppose, refer to Christian benevolence towards the suffering poor; but, like the 'De Disciplina Claustralium,' it speaks more of the conventual life among the Brethren, and how they are both inwardly and outwardly to embrace a life of poverty in the place where they dwell. The 'Dialogus Novitiorum' explains the purpose and style of the work in its title. The old venerable Frieslander Priest who is brought forward in the fifth chapter was a favourite hero with Thomas.

(10) The 'Doctrinale seu Manuale Juvenum' is of a similar character: but is more in the form of a short directory for leading a devout life. And it is to be noticed that Thomas begins by recommending a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, to be followed by an attentive regard to the voice of conscience within us. The book 'Exercitia Spiritualia' comes after this, and is followed by another of like title; both of which relate to those things which will promote the soul's welfare. 'De vera Com-punctione Animæ' bears more upon the early life of

the convert, and how his contrition of heart is carried on with God in secret. Then follow two books, entitled 'De Solitudine et Silentio,' in praise of the solitary life and of silence, which appear to have been written after he was relieved from the office of Procurator, that he might the better apply himself to a life of contemplation. (13)

Among the minor works of à Kempis the 'De Elevatione Mentis ad acquirendum Summum Bonum' may be considered one of his choicest pieces. And then also we have some prayers by him, and some Hymns or Canticles. (15)

The Lives written by Thomas are in three books, the first containing that of Gerard, the great; the second, that of Florentius, and the third that of nine of the earlier members and fathers of the Brothers of Common Life. As Henry Brune lived the longest of these persons whose memoirs are recorded, and died in the year 1439, it is thought probable that they were written after this time. To these there is added another biography, namely that of the sainted Dutch maid, Lidwine, which is dedicated to the Brethren, Canons Regular of the Monastery of St Elizabeth, near Briel, Zeland, by one who calls himself 'Frater N., pauper et peregrinus.' As this memoir does not find a place in the earlier editions of Thomas's work, it has been accounted spurious: and the letter N. seems to point to some other person rather than to Thomas. (1) 9e (2) F (3) M

Following these we have some letters of Thomas, which have been preserved, and to which I have already drawn attention. To these succeed some more prayers Cx

on the Passion of our Lord. Then other prayers, concluding with a few more sacred Canticles.

The contemporaneous biographer of à Kempis enumerates in all thirty-eight treatises, small and great, as being incontestably written by him.

The enthusiastic commendation of Prior Pirkhamer in his letter to Peter Danhausser, the publisher of the first edition of Thomas à Kempis's works in 1494, to encourage him in his project, will form a fitting conclusion to these few remarks; it especially applies to his best known writings. 'Nothing more holy,' he says, 'nothing more honourable, nothing more religious, lastly, nothing more for the Christian common-weal, can you ever do, than to take care that these books of Thomas à Kempis be made public; which, though hitherto not taken notice of, may, as fire hidden in the veins of a flint, be very useful and serviceable to the Christian religion. . . . It will be well and considerately done by you, if you bring them out of dust and obscurity into light, that they may be generally read, since they either lead minds disposed and prepared to the search after their Eternal happiness, and to the contemplation of useful learning and solid wisdom, and this after an easy, swift, and compendious method; or else they do fortify those who are already devout and spiritual, liberating them from the shameful ignorance and inexperience which is so extremely dangerous. And of how great edification these works are likely to be for all Christians, even to the greatest and most learned, it is impossible to speak or write. Therefore do not slight them, courteous Peter,' &c.

The decay and overthrow of 'the Brothers of Com-

mon Life' as a Society comes next to our notice in the order of time. We have seen how rapidly it was extended, and how many Houses were opened in various places, how many Congregations of the Brothers, and Monasteries of Canons Regular belonging to them, existed, so that the Community was in a most flourishing condition during the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis, and not only shewed great vitality, but was recognised in the country for its zeal in the advancement of learning, as well as for its influence in restoring vital Christianity. It might have been supposed to contain within it the elements of greater durability, and to have gone on growing and taking deeper root in the land; and the more so because it had within it the elementary principles of the Reformation, and seemed to meet the yearning spirit of the times for a restoration of true and earnest religion. How then was it, that it appears to have been rather submerged, instead of being borne upwards and sustained by the rising waves of the great change which took place in Europe in the sixteenth century?

The Society was not so anxious about its own existence as it was about accomplishing the work for which it had been created, viz., the restoration of true religion in the land. The mystical character which it took was well adapted for this end, since all true religion is mystical, though all that is called mystical is not true religion. It broke in upon the deadness and formalism that followed in the wake of Scholasticism; it awakened up in men the sense of a new life, and taught them afresh how to live with God after an inward and conscious manner. The encouragement given to the reading of the Bible, the greater freedom of worship that was

admitted, in having public prayers offered up in the mother tongue, and in preaching to the people in the same, a more liberal and general education than that which had hitherto been given by the monks, the life and soul that was infused into religious exercises, the individual access of the soul to God, and dependence upon Him for grace and salvation without the intervention of the priest or the services of the Church, though not with the view of setting these aside, but with the deep consciousness that something very much more was required even to make these effective, viz., personal repentance, conformity to the will of God, and attachment to the Saviour—all these were distinctive features in the efforts and labours of the Brothers of Common Life, and in which they differed greatly from the general character of the Churchmen of those days. And it might have been thought that such a Society would have been upheld, and gladly used as an instrument in furthering in a still greater measure the work of the coming Reformation. But it was not so.

In helping forward the latter it brought about its own dissolution; the birth of the one was apparently the death of the other. There was another law at work, as in other instances, which counteracted the law of development and success, and the Society must succumb or disappear, as the morning star before the rising sun, or as the closed bud is lost sight of in the opening rose. The principles of a Reformation which the Brothers of Common Life had fostered and disseminated were not of such a character that they could be confined to a religious body, or only be developed through it; they must break forth on all sides, they

were to be scattered broadcast over the country, to spread as leaven among the people, to permeate all society. And therefore the work went beyond them; it took up a wider, more practical, and effective way in compassing its end; it must not be trammelled any longer by bonds and influences which would in any wise confine and limit its operations; hence the Society which had been the chief means of pioneering the way for the Reformation, must dwindle away and gradually come to nothing before the more exciting, absorbing, and attractive influence of such a memorable crisis. But the Brothers of Common Life had accomplished a grand work in their day, and the fruit was beyond what they could have looked for; and though it led to their own dissolution, they could well rejoice and willingly submit to stand on one side, as many a true servant of God has had to do, when, having fulfilled his Master's work, he becomes enfeebled, and sees the same work taken up by other hands, and carried on in other ways, probably more extensive, energetic, and effective.

Moreover, when the struggle about the Reformation became more acute, the Papal party, who had gained ascendancy in the Church, insisted that the Brothers of Common Life, who claved to the Church as a Divine institution, must either withdraw from the monasteries, or give in their adherence to them. This, though not all at once carried out, led to a great disbandonment of the Brotherhood.

It will be remembered also, that the main occupation of the Brothers, and whereby they chiefly maintained themselves, since they were not allowed to go about the

country begging, was the copying books. But on the invention of *Printing* and its subsequent extension, which effected the object with so much greater speed and economy, this occupation lost all its importance, and to a great extent took away the means of supporting themselves.

The Brothers of Common Life had met with great success also in *the education of the young*. They founded, as we have shewn, many schools, where previously there had been none. And by the substitution of a better instruction they had supplanted to a large extent that of the monks. They had assisted many youths of ability, and trained not a few to become excellent teachers. In this respect also, however, they were in a manner superseded by the progress of general knowledge. Their best scholars, on attaining to manhood, like Alexander Hegius, Herman von Busche, Louis Drunkenberg, and others, set up schools of their own. And as in these institutions the circle of polite learning was made to embrace a wider range and greater variety, than was the case among the Brethren—who still, in comparison, occupied a somewhat narrow and ascetically restricted position—they soon attracted all the best talent, whilst the schools of the Brethren were more and more forsaken.¹

Thus we see 'how various causes more immediately contributed to the decline of the Brothers of Common Life. The Society gradually disappeared, making its exit with becoming honour; and deeply respected by the great men of the age, it yielded to the new religious and intellectual development and fervour which it had

¹ Ullmann, *Ref. bef. Ref.* p. 174.

been instrumental in kindling. Other hands took up the work, which it step by step resigned; it had fulfilled its mission, and run its course, as the waters of some fertilizing stream which had now reached the ocean, and, no longer confined within narrow limits, had entered upon a wide expanse, with a boundless range, bearing upon its bosom the enterprize and the riches of numberless minds.

We now proceed to take up another of the subjects, which presents much interest. *The discovery of the skull and bones of Thomas à Kempis* happened soon after the dissolution of the Monastery at Mount St Agnes. When I paid a visit to the city of Zwolle in the autumn of 1875, the gentleman to whom I brought an introduction, Mr Th. F. van Riemsdijk, who was much interested in my inquiry about Thomas à Kempis, and who had but recently read some German publications about him, informed me among other things that there were some relics of the venerable and saintly man deposited in one of the churches; 'but,' continued he, 'though I have been several years in Zwolle, and have asked to have them shewn to me, I have never been able to get a sight of them, because the key of the coffer has been lost.' After further conversation he added, 'Since you have come so far, we will, however, make another effort to see them.' Upon this he kindly accompanied me to the church, and having made application to the sacristan, we got a similar answer, that we could not possibly see them, since the key had not been forthcoming for more than three years, and the coffer could not be opened. Mr van Riemsdijk interceded much for me with the man, and told him that I had come a long distance to

see all that could possibly be found out relative to Thomas à Kempis. At last he said, 'I will see what can be done, and send word to your hotel to let you know whether the relics can be seen.' With this we were content to wait.

In the evening, on my return from Agnietenberg, the site of Mount St Agnes, I found a message had been sent by the sacristan, that if I would call at the church in the morning, he would contrive that we should see the relics of Thomas à Kempis. My friend also called upon me, and we made arrangements to meet and go to the church together the next day at nine o'clock. I was glad to have the company of Mr Riemsdijk, since speaking English fairly, he acted as an interpreter, besides being very agreeable and intelligent. The next day, however, was market-day, and as we passed through the market-place to the church, a very busy and lively scene presented itself. Women with their butter and eggs and poultry from the country were standing with their baskets, and seemed to find a ready sale, and so also did those who were selling vegetables and fruits, whilst clothes and shoes and various kinds of ware were exposed, and all seemed intent upon doing business, while customers in abundance were not wanting. When we got to the church we found that mass was being celebrated; and though it was market-day, and a very busy time, there must have been from three to four hundred persons present, and rarely have I beheld a more earnest and devout congregation. Many of those present had evidently been to market and finished their business, for numbers of baskets were left at the lower end of the church.

When the service was over we went to the vestry at the back of the church and were admitted by the sacristan, and 'here, on a shelf above one of the doors, we noticed a coffer about a yard and a half long, and more than a foot and a quarter deep, with this inscription painted on it within a gilded scroll, *RELIQUIÆ PII THOMAE KEMPIS*. A short ladder was brought, and we were invited to mount and inspect the remains; and here we saw the thigh and arm bones lying together, and a round box, about a foot in diameter, wherein the skull was placed; this was brought down and placed on the table, while the other bones were not disturbed; and, the skull being lifted out, it was very tenderly, reverently, and affectionately regarded. Here was the receptacle of the brains and thinking faculties of that pious man who wrote the books of the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' and was such an ardent lover and follower of our Blessed Lord.

This was a very solemn and privileged moment when I felt that I had been brought very near to him outwardly, when I could both see and touch his earthly remains. In a smaller box still there were several lesser bones, and two or three other things to which allusion will shortly be made. No repulsive feelings stirred within one on beholding them, but rather a happy and sacred awe seemed to steal over me, for were they not the hallowed relics of one of the dearest saints of God, and whose memory was sweetly cherished by the whole Church throughout the world? After gazing upon them for some time we saw all carefully and becomingly put away again; and my only regret was that these relics of Thomas were not placed in some other resting-place than on a shelf—in some place where a fitting memorial

might be raised over them, since signs of decay in the crumbling of the edges of the bones began to appear; otherwise they seemed to be in good preservation, and fairly guarded. We could not help observing, in the fine, broad, high, and fully developed skull, what an agreement there seemed to be with the likeness of Thomas, which we had but lately seen at the 'Pastoor's' house.

Before leaving I enquired, how it was known that these *were* the remains of Thomas à Kempis. Might they not be the bones of someone else? I said. But the sacristan replied that they had been duly verified by competent authority; and showed us an account, in a small publication of fourteen pages, of the finding of them more than two hundred years ago, and how it had been ascertained that they belonged to Thomas. I procured a copy of this little work, which was in Dutch, hoping to learn more about the matter at my leisure. On leaving Zwolle I felt that the object of my visit to the place with which Thomas was so closely associated was more fully accomplished than I could have expected, and that I was amply repaid for any trouble; for probably I was the only Englishman who had ever seen the remains of à Kempis.

In the following account the reader will find the substance of what is contained in the little pamphlet respecting the discovery and removal of the skull and bones of Thomas à Kempis, from the burial grounds of Mount St Agnes, together with other particulars, most of which are supplied by Professor Mooren.

cf p. 302 The earthly remains of Thomas à Kempis had rested for two hundred years among his Brethren, beneath the

ruins of the monastery, in the still bosom of the earth at Mount St Agnes, when Max Heinrich, Elector of Cologne, felt impelled to disturb the repose of his grave by taking up his bones. He was doubtless afraid that in the existing state of affairs the sacrilegious spirit of plunder would lead to the violation of his remains. Reverently to open the grave of such a man, then, was far better than to leave it to the chances of desecration and despoliation.

Mysterious tales and traditions, according to the statement of the Protestants, as to the spot where he was laid, lingered among the few Roman Catholic people. It was known from the Chronicles of St Agnes that Thomas à Kempis must have been buried at the eastern end of the cloister. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Vicar of Zwolle, Arnold Waeger, had heard from his predecessor in office, who had laboured in the place forty-four years, and had only been dead ten years before the time we are treating of, that between the grave of Thomas and the door which opened from the choir into the cloister there had been a space of seven feet left. As his former Vicar must have lived in the previous generation, he might have been acquainted with some of the old inhabitants of the ruined Abbey, who gave him this information. The search, however, was begun; and after three weeks had been spent in digging up the rubbish, and when at last the foundations of the Church and cloisters had been laid bare, Waeger could stand upon the spot underneath which rested the remains of Thomas, and say to the workmen, 'If you do not find him here, you will find him nowhere.' This took place on August 1, 1672. Search

was accordingly made there, and the result was successful.

From the details handed down to us of the disinterment, there seems not to be the slightest doubt as to the genuineness of the opened grave, and the remains discovered therein being those of Thomas à Kempis. When the lid of the coffin was taken off, the bones there were still attached to each other, and had apparently been undisturbed since his body had been laid there by his sorrowing Brethren in 1471. The head rested on two pieces of turf, and the hands were crossed. The ribs and shoulder bones were destroyed, but a small piece of his stole could still be seen. The bones of his left foot were covered with lichen, which, as it resembled yellow, white, and pink flowers, was regarded by some enthusiastic admirers as a miracle. On August 3, the bones with the skull and whatever else was found in the coffin, were carefully taken out, wrapped in white linen, and carried in triumph to Zwolle. The Elector kept the precious relics until the following day in the house of the judge Zwenhuysen, where he was staying, and then delivered them by the hands of his Commissary, Von Mering, a Canon of Cologne, to Pastor Waeger, in order that he might reverently preserve them in his private chapel dedicated to St Joseph. He also commanded him to have a shrine made at the Elector's expense: and two years after Waeger placed within this reliquary the bones of Thomas, and all that appertained to them, on the Festival of St Peter and St Paul.

And now it is only just and becoming to notice, before concluding these Memorials, a few tributes of

respect and veneration which have been paid to the memory of this truly great and good man since he died. When Cardinal Fabius Chisi, who afterwards became Pope under the name of Alexander VII., in 1655, was living at Cologne as Nuncio to the Rhine Provinces, he held Thomas à Kempis in such peculiar honour that he caused a picture of him to be painted for him in Zwolle; and further promised that he would undertake his canonization, if only he could discover his bones. When, however, they were discovered in 1672, he was no longer living, and another Pope ruled, who knew not Thomas, or if he did, did not feel that enthusiasm for his name that his predecessor had done.

a pict
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Before this time also, in the year 1629, it is said that the citizens of his native town (Kempen) strove to do some honour to one of whom they might be justly proud. John Wilmius records in his history of this place, 'This year we have caused three pictures of our countryman, Thomas à Kempis, to be executed at Cologne, in order to do honour to the memory of so great a man. One of them hangs in the Castle, one in the Town-hall (Rathhaus), and the third in the Parish Church. The total cost amounted to eighty Reichsthalers. The artist was Franz Kessler by name.

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(16)

So far back as the year 1632 the magistrates caused search to be made in the archives of the town, respecting the house where Thomas was born, but it proved fruitless. That made in 1657 was more successful. The legal document was found containing the details of the sale by the Hemerken brothers of their father's house, some allusion to which has been given in one of the earlier chapters.

The most important memorial, however, which his

1662
 fellow-citizens raised to the memory of Thomas à Kempis in his native town, was unquestionably the founding of the Gymnasium. Whether the old tradition still lingered in their minds that the site of some of its buildings was identical with the paternal home of Thomas, or it was merely out of respect to his memory, it is not known, but in their enthusiasm for him the Gymnasium received the name of *Josephino-Thomæum*. St Joseph, being regarded as the patron saint of Christian children, was thereby held in honour, but had to share it with Thomas in the designation given to the new institution. It was founded in 1662, *i.e.* ten years before the bones of Thomas à Kempis were discovered; and, according to the custom of those times, the students acted the Life of Thomas à Kempis on the stage, at the end of the first year. The piece was composed by H. Reek, one of the founders and first rectors of the school, and printed. It is much to be regretted that a copy of it is no longer extant. There would certainly have been references in this play to the scenes of his early childhood, and other incidents mentioned connecting him with Kempen.

For many of these particulars I am indebted to Mooren's work. But in a letter I received from Dr Gross of Kempen, he speaks of 'the present Thomæum Gymnasium' as distinct from the Gymnasium of the town; and states that the latter was built on the site of the ancient castle, three towers of which are unaltered. Of this latter-named Gymnasium he kindly sent me a photograph.

Another memorial raised to Thomas à Kempis by his native city is the so-called 'Thomas-Foundation,'

which was a home for orphans, old men, or sick people, called after him.

Mention also should here be made of an appropriate means which one of the late Queens of Holland made use of to honour the memory of Thomas, and to remind others of his good name and works. Whenever she heard of a truly virtuous wedded pair, who were about to celebrate their golden wedding-day, in addition to her good wishes for their happiness, she presented them with a handsome copy of the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi.'¹

A splendid memorial of Thomas, says Mooren, in the shape of his own works, is undoubtedly the Büllingen Collection at the Cologne Municipal Library. Louis von Büllingen, formerly a member of the Imperial Abbey Cornelimünster at Aix-la-Chapelle, was born at the princely estate of Rath, near Kempen: he was a diligent antiquary, and collected, with the industry peculiar to Benedictines, to whose order he belonged, more than 400 copies of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' some of them rare specimens; which he bequeathed to the City of Cologne by his will dated November 17, 1838.²

It may be well also to notice here, that in the year 1841 a magnificent polyglot edition of the four books of the 'De Imitatione Christi' was published at Lyons, written in French, English, Greek, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

But to turn to a still more recent acknowledgment of this truly great and good man. Dr Gross, the head master of the Town Gymnasium, informs me that a Cen-

¹ Mooren, *Nachrichten*, pp. 191, 192.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 182.

tenary Fête in honour of the sainted Thomas à Kempis took place at Kempen on August 11, 1880, when the members of the Historical Association of the Lower Rhine held a festive gathering, in which a large number of the burghers took part. He forwarded to me also an account of it, in the 33rd number of the 'Wochenblatt,' from which I draw the following particulars:—

'The congress of the Historical Association of the Lower Rhine, which took place on Wednesday, at the Hotel Pont Pontzen, had a special interest for us, because a discussion took place with reference to Thomas à Kempis, Kempen's greatest and noblest son. The town was gaily decorated at the instance of the Burgomaster; and in the absence of the President of the Association Dr Mooren of Wachtendonk, who is now quite blind, the Vice-President, Professor Floss of Bonn, opened the congress, heartily welcoming those present, and expressing his pleasure at seeing such a good attendance.'

He then made reference to Kempen being the birth-place of Thomas à Kempis, and to his ascetic life. Many attempts, continued Professor Floss, are being made to rob Thomas of the authorship of the 'Imitation of Christ,' on grounds which are not reliable. He had left a memorial of himself better than one of bronze or stone, but posterity had a duty to perform in erecting a monument to his memory; and this, he said, could be best accomplished by an exhaustive treatise to settle the questions about the authorship.

Then the Burgomaster, Herr Plum, welcomed the Association in the name of the town, drawing attention to the flags and other demonstrations; and expressed his gratification that it had assembled in Kempen, the

birth-place of Thomas, on the occasion of the *fifth centenary* commemoration of the birth of that great man.

Dr Gross gave a comprehensive sketch of the life of Thomas, and proved from his writings his distinguished learning and great piety. A centenary commemoration was a grand historical acknowledgment, and at the same time an act of gratitude, which in the first instance was due to the man from whose writings posterity had drawn largely of culture, deep teaching, steadfast faith, and the perfection of moral purity, which had respect to the Author of all good. Dr Gross then entered upon a defence of à Kempis being the author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*;' and observed, that the very existence in history of the only man, Abbot Gersen, whose name with any right could be set up against that of our Thomas, has not yet been proved; and the most recent work in his favour, that of the Benedictine Wolfsgruber, has been crushed by determined opposition; and concluded by saying, that the adornment of the town, and the warm sympathy shewn in the day's proceedings, proved that his native town preserved a grateful recollection of him, faithfully demonstrated throughout so many centuries.

It is pleasing to learn what has been done on the Continent, and to notice the endeavours made by his countrymen to honour and perpetuate the memory of the saintly author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*.' It shews how much they admire him and revere his name; and may we not take it as an indication that not a few have profited by his writings, and are in some measure animated by his spirit, in striving like him to be followers of Christ? And in concluding these memorials of THOMAS A KEMPIS AND THE BROTHERS OF COMMON LIFE asso-

ciated with him, I would express an ardent hope that a better acquaintance with the deep, earnest, holy piety exhibited in their lives and works, which it has been my desire to bring into more prominent light, may serve, by God's blessing, to lead many souls to greater diligence in following the blessed footsteps of Christ's most holy Life; and, from beholding Him their Lord and Master more, and loving Him more also, they may be changed into His image from glory to glory, till they come at last to be with Him, where He is; and with all his saints and à Kempis with them, to behold the majesty of that glory which he had with the Father, before the world began. Amen.

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